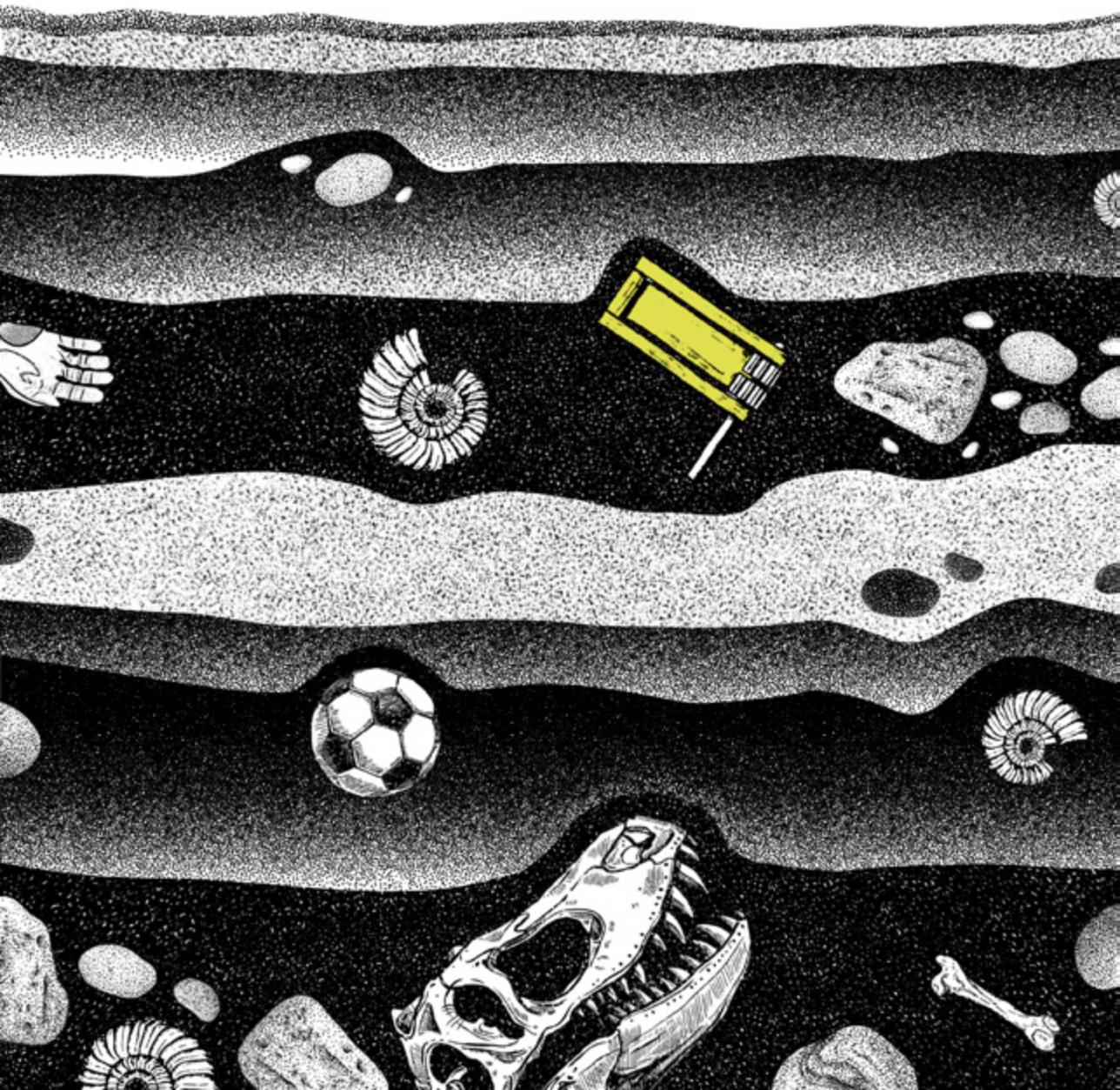


ISSUE FIVE

GROUND

THE
SQUALL

— BLIZZARD'S BREEZY BROTHER —



THE SQUALL

Matt Thacker

It's worth repeating here the reasons why we set up *The Squall* five months ago as a digital football magazine to give freelance writers a forum for their work. Not just so they can get paid to write, but so they have something to aim for, a sense of job satisfaction at a time when such satisfaction is in short supply. The return of football has meant more work for freelancers and the possibility that we will not need to produce *The Squall* for much longer, but for the moment that needs remains.

The Blizzard has never been about the here and now, it's much more taken with the there and then. And although current events led to its emergence, we see *The Squall* as serving the same function, showcasing great football writing on subjects you are unlikely to read about anywhere else. We hope you enjoy this "Ground" issue.

If you are happy to buy this issue, please do so by paying into our bank account with sort code 40-05-17 and account number 71515942, or you can pay via PayPal to [paypal.me/thesquall](https://www.paypal.me/thesquall). Any money paid into either of these accounts will be used for the sole purpose of producing future issues.

We are very grateful to all of the people who have waived fees and donated to *The Squall* since we announced the project. Special thanks go to: Nick Ames, Philippe Auclair, John Brewin, Kieran Canning, James Corbett, John Cross, Martin da Cruz, Miguel Delaney, Andrew Downie, Peter Drury, Ken Early, Emmet Gates, Sasha Goryunov, John Harding, Simon Hart, Gary Hartley, Ian Hawkey, Frank Heinen, Tom Holland, Adam Hurrey, Elis James, Neil Jensen, Samindra Kunti, Jonathan Liew, Simon Mills, James Montague, David Owen, MM Owen, Simone Pierotti, Jack Pitt-Brooke, Gavin Ramjuan, Callum Rice-Coates, Philip Ross, Paul Simpson, Marcus Speller, Jon Spurling, Seb Stafford-Bloor, Ed Sugden, Jonathan Wilson, Suzy Wrack, and Shinobu Yamanaka. And huge thanks to Getty Images, for use of the photos.

September 2020

EDITOR'S NOTE

Jonathan Wilson

As the daily death rate, in the UK and most of Europe at least, falls to less horrifying levels, and we begin to get used to the restrictions caused by the pandemic, the economic impact becomes increasingly apparent. Jobs are already being lost in journalism, but with the UK entering its deepest ever recession, the likelihood is for devastation across a range of industries.

Quite how that will play out in football remains to be seen. Even if some fans are allowed back into stadiums at some point later this year, substantial damage has already been done. The likelihood is that the wealthy, able to sustain losses in the short term, will benefit as they pick off assets from smaller clubs who need transfer revenues to survive. But as more people are squeezed, television companies will find their revenues hit, partly through cancelled subscriptions and partly through a fall in advertising revenue. Everybody, at every level, will have to reset.

Even though matches are being played, few journalists are allowed in to games, several leagues have been cancelled and, with budgets limited, so too are opportunities. *The Squall* was established as a short-term measure to try to provide at least some work for at least some people and, perhaps more importantly, as a symbol that some opportunities do still exist, remains just as relevant now as it did when we launched. Which is to say

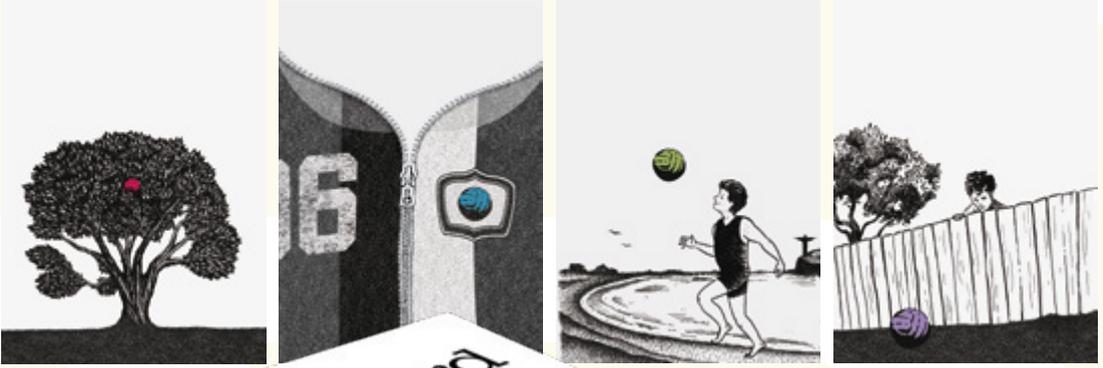
that we will keep going for a little while longer – but we do need your support.

The magazine has been funded largely by writers for *The Blizzard* waiving their fees for last year, but also by kind donations from the public. In addition, all editorial and design staff are working for free. Such sacrifices to help the community of readers and writers suggests the initial spirit that fired *The Blizzard's* launch a decade ago still burns.

But *The Squall* can't be a charity. It has to stand as a magazine in its own right. We needed the donations to launch, but now we need people to buy the product. Each issue will be available on a pay-what-you-want basis. We recommend £3, but if that's a stretch then pay what you can afford; conversely, if you can afford more, then every extra penny is welcome. And please do promote us however you can.

Hopefully we won't need to exist for too much longer. We're a temporary product to get us through the crisis and we urge you to support us on that basis.

September 2020



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CONTENTS

The Squall, Issue Five – Ground

8. **Dave Bowler, The Summit**
How West Bromwich Albion came to have the highest ground in England
14. **Luke Connelly, Diplomatic Manoeuvres**
What Russia's World Cup stadiums say about Vladimir Putin's government
20. **Ewan Flynn, The Boycott**
How Blackpool fans forced out the Oyston ownership
28. **Gregory Wakeman, Going to Ground**
Six of the greatest sliding tackles of all time
34. **Themis Karapanagiotis, Rizoupoli**
How a temporary ground on the outskirts of Athens became a byword for thuggery
40. **Joseph Fox & Matt McGinn, Returned to the Elves**
The rugged beauty of Iceland's abandoned stadiums
48. **Finn Ranson, Strangers in a Strange Land**
The role of football in Jewish displaced person camps after World War II
54. **Alasdair Mackenzie, Why is it so hard to build a ground in Italy?**
The struggle to update Italy's increasingly decrepit stadiums
60. **Jessy Parker Humphreys, Freeholding Tight**
How the Stamford Bridge pitch has been kept safe from the developers
66. **Harry Robinson, The Highest Derby in the World**
Bolivar, The Strongest and how altitude influences La Paz's great rivalry
72. **Jonathan Wilson, Terroir**
How vacant lots overcame the playing fields
78. **Contributors**

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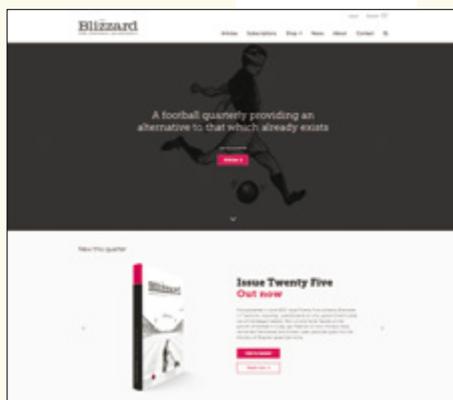
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THE SUMMIT

How West Bromwich
Albion came to have the
highest ground in England

BY DAVE BOWLER

*The West Brom groundsman checks
the pitch at The Hawthorns, 1990*

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West Bromwich Building



If there's one fact that most fans of any allegiance know about The Hawthorns, home of West Bromwich Albion, it's that it is the highest league ground in the whole of England – 551 feet above sea level, seeing as you've asked.

An extremely well-known national broadcaster once asked me to verify the story and, once I had, asked me, "Why?" I've mused on the appropriate response for years now. Did the architects have the sea specially lowered just to claim the prize? Was it constructed atop a slumbering Black County volcano – which would at least account for the eventual emergence of Gary Megson?

Romantically, my preference was to think Albion were God's chosen football team and He simply wanted to be closer to the action, though that rather flies in the face of 120 years of results. If He is omnipotent, why would He apparently choose to have so many Saturday afternoons off? It's not as if being used to playing at altitude helped Albion on their travels either. Five FA Cup finals and two wins in 14 years at Stoney Lane, the previous ancestral pile, stack up better than five more finals (three wins), one League Cup and a First Division title in 120 years since. Come on God, eye on the ball!

The truth is the Hawthorns is where it is, and as high as it is, because of another of its curious facts – it was the first out-of-town League ground in the country, built not to facilitate the construction of a retail park around it but because it was the cheapest and quickest way of creating a stadium to meet the demands of the rapidly burgeoning crowds created by the growth of the Football League.

Considering they've been at the Hawthorns for so long, Albion come from itinerant stock. They initially played on Cooper's Hill and Dartmouth Park before moving to an enclosed ground, Bunn's Field, in August 1881 and then to Four Acres a year later. Albion's imperial phase coincided with the 1885 move to Stoney Lane which, like its predecessors, was within a stone's throw of the town centre.

That land was leased and so, after initial enthusiasm, including building the "Noah's Ark" grandstand, as time went by and the lease ran down the directors showed no interest in improving the ground. Couple that with Albion's success in the FA Cup and a plot not large enough to cope with the general growing interest in the game and Stoney Lane had built in its own obsolescence.

In April 1899, with Albion struggling so badly to make ends meet that a general meeting was called to see whether the club could even continue, the *Free Press* portentously intoned, "The fact is that with the high prices now ruling for players, and the transfer system, the Albion are placed at an enormous disadvantage in their comparatively poor financial position in securing really good men. These demands for high wages are gradually killing the game in many towns." And they say history can teach us nothing.

To compete financially, Albion needed to speculate to accumulate and head for new territory. Land in the town centre was in short supply and pricey with it, so the Throstles had to look towards Birmingham to find the space they needed. The search wasn't easy, so when, on 5 December 1899, the cavalry

came to the rescue in the unlikely shape of the Sandwell Park Colliery Company, it was a godsend.

They had a ten-acre pocket of land on the corner of Halfords Lane and the Birmingham Road and it was Albion's for the next 14 years for an initial £70pa. The Colliery chose to hedge its bets by stipulating that they "reserve full powers for working the mines under and adjacent to the land, without being liable for damage to surface or erections thereon." So if your centre-forward suddenly dropped 250 feet through a hole in the six-yard box, it would be, in a very real and legally binding sense, the club's problem.

The proposed stadium had good access, wide roads coming up to the ground from West Bromwich, Smethwick and Birmingham, though the later arrival of the car meant that easy post-match departures became a thing of the dim and distant. With the main tram routes into Birmingham running right past the site, the perfect location had dropped into the laps of the Albion directors.

It was an area of marshland in a rural location. There was a brook running diagonally through what was effectively a meadow, forming a border between Smethwick, Handsworth and West Bromwich. The Woodman Inn was on the Handsworth side, along with a blacksmith's forge and a few houses. At the Smethwick end was a large house, Oaklands, and a garden nursery. A large private house was to one side of the land. It later became the Hawthorns Hotel and housed many Albion players – Ray Barlow got word of his first England call-up there

– and is now a Greggs. From the sublime to the sausage roll.

There was £1,800 worth of work needed, to drain and relay the ground and construct suitable stands. To save a few bob, the club decided to ferry Noah's Ark to the new site, but debentures were issued to fund the rest. Plenty of clubs some 70 and 80 years later (including Albion) failed to learn from these dangers and got into the same financial peril that nearly destroyed the club within five years, but that's another story.

Some 120 men were engaged on the job, and little wonder. They had to lead the brook underground, install 1,600 yards of drains under the new pitch, lay 300 loads of ash under the top soil, put down 12,000 yards of turf, then take 5,000 square yards of soil from the Birmingham Road end to the Smethwick end to try to level off the slope on the pitch. But the *pièce de résistance*, as they say in West Bromwich, was the building of a new 5,000-seater stand on the Halfords Lane side, though it was not quite ready for the start of the season, with parts of the roof and the south wing not finished.

But what to name the place? Frank Heaven, the secretary-manager of the time, had done a little research and discovered the site had been part of an estate covered in trees, bushes and wildlife. Given the existing relationship between the emblematic throstle, or song thrush, and the most prevalent of those trees, what better name than that of the original estate? Welcome to the Hawthorns.

As Kevin Costner would tell you, "If you build it, they will come." And, if they

were coming to The Hawthorns, Albion were going to have to part with their money. It was sixpence a game to get in and stand to watch, a price that remained until 1919-20 when it was doubled to a shilling – how's that for rewarding the homecoming heroes who'd just won a war? The most expensive seats were in the centre of the Halfords Lane stand, coming in at two shillings a game or 25 shillings for a season ticket. If you fancied your luck in Noah's Ark – the woodworm went in two by two – that was a shilling a game or 12s 6d for the season. Ladies were admitted to the Halfords Lane stand at a discount, paying just 15 shillings for a season ticket.

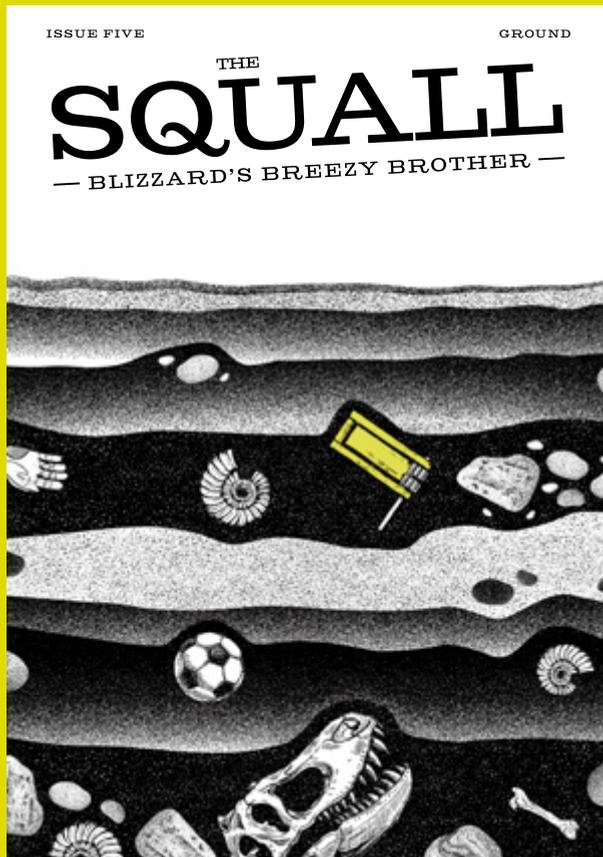
The Hawthorns was declared ready to host its first ever game, the great occasion taking place on Monday, 3 September 1900, a local works holiday, Albion meeting Derby County in the First Division. Amid appropriate pomp and circumstance, even William McGregor, doyen of the Football League and WG Grace's stunt double, was in attendance. The game was no classic, but midway through the first half, the first goal was scored at the new ground. It came from a Derby player, the legendary England striker Steve Bloomer – at least Bloomer was a Black Country lad, born in Cradley Heath, five miles from the Hawthorns.

It looked as if the Throstles might have to endure a bitter disappointment on such a big day for the club but with 12 minutes to go, Chippy Simmons smacked in the equaliser. Following the game, the two sides repaired to the Sandwell Hotel in West Bromwich for what used to be known as a slap-up do with all the trimmings.

Attendance figures of the time are notoriously unreliable, but the crowd was put at 20,104, impressive enough given the Halfords Lane stand still wasn't finished. Since the final First Division crowd at Stoney Lane five months earlier was only 5,187, this was an early indication that the move had been a sound decision. Further evidence came the following Saturday when 35,417 packed the ground to watch Albion take on Villa, though apparently plenty more got in after scaling the fences.

The initial enthusiasm had inevitably waned a little by the time the Throstles got their first Hawthorns win, at the fourth attempt, beating Manchester City 3-2 before a crowd of 11,183. But even if the numbers had slipped away from that early peak, it was clear that the switch to the Hawthorns had been a huge success.

Shame they got relegated at the end of the season. 🙄



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Thank you in advance for helping out.

DIPLOMATIC MANOEUVRES

What Russia's World Cup
stadiums say about Vladimir
Putin's government

BY LUKE CONNELLY

*Kylian Mbappe holds the World Cup
trophy at the Luzhniki Stadium*



There is no question that the 2014 World Cup was both a financial and PR disaster for Brazil. In a country in which an enormous proportion of people live in abject poverty, public spending to host the tournament was double initial forecasts and what did they have to show for it? The protests were plentiful and in many ways justified. The hosting of the tournament coincided with the onset of recession in Brazil and two years later they were due to host the 2016 Olympics. Political dissatisfaction grew as quickly as the escalating construction costs and the Brazilian economy is yet to recover from the fallout of the ongoing recession. The political transformation was also unprecedented. Out went the left-wing Workers' Party, following Dilma Rousseff's impeachment, and in came the reactionary, right-wing government of Jair Bolsonaro.

Fast forward four years and the greatest show on earth swapped Copacabana for the Kremlin. All in all, Russia was a fairly obvious choice. Under Soviet rule, Moscow had hosted the 1980 Olympics and more recently Sochi had hosted the 2014 Winter Olympics yet, despite an extensive footballing history, Russia had never staged the World Cup.

In many ways a Russian World Cup was just what the doctor ordered for Fifa's public image. This may sound bizarre, given the country's highly questionable human rights record and attitudes towards homosexuality and ethnic minorities, but the damage to the prestige of hosting a World Cup, following the protests in Brazil, has been long-lasting and significant. Attention had been drawn to

the vast sums of public money required to host the event and even economists in the wealthiest nations would argue that such sums would be better spent elsewhere.

In Russia, however, Fifa could be fairly confident that such protests would be quickly suppressed, should they even take place. They certainly wouldn't protest against the government in the same way that Brazilians did. Russia has taken a very different political route to most major states. From the Tsars, to the Soviet era, to the premierships of Yeltsin, Putin, Putin's puppet Medvedev and then Putin again, there has never been a voter-led democracy.

Russia's hosting of the 2018 World Cup is a classic example of a state exerting soft power via the medium of an international sports tournament. And there are plenty of examples. In *Soccernomics*, Simon Kuper and Stefan Szymanski argue that "if playing in a tournament creates social cohesion, hosting one creates even more." In Putin's Russia, this is social cohesion crafted entirely in the state's image.

The stadiums constructed for the World Cup are enormous concrete reminders of the government's involvement in funding and developing cities across the Federation. The reality is that this funding comes straight from public coffers for little obvious financial benefit. The notion that a football ground increases the number of tourists to a city in the long term is spurious.

Take FC Sochi for instance. The club was founded in 2018 following the 2,000-mile relocation of Dinamo St Petersburg

under the ownership of the oligarch Boris Rotenberg, a long-term friend and close confidant of Vladimir Putin. Are FC Sochi's attendances likely to increase as a result of a new ground? Sochi's average attendance for the 2019-20 Premier Division season was just over 9,000. It's a notable increase on the previous year, prior to their promotion, but still leaves some 35,000-plus empty seats.

Similarly, in the second tier, FC Nizhny Novgorod averaged just under 7,000 in their 45,000 all-seater stadium and Baltika Kaliningrad's average attendance of just over 6,000 was under 20% of capacity. The increased rent could make operations economically impossible. You only have to look at Kaiserslautern's recent financial demise for that. Trapped in a stadium that they struggle to fill and struggle to pay for, they have struggled to make ends meet and are staring into the black hole of financial oblivion.

The reality is that the spectacle drives attendances, not necessarily the venue. Under Suleiman Kerimov's ownership, Anzhi Makhachkala drew new crowds by assembling a successful and incredibly expensive playing squad, though this naturally had its own financial complications.

There's no denying that Sochi's Fisht Stadium is very impressive from an architectural point of view. It's designed to replicate the Caucasus mountains and, courtesy of its open bowl shape, offers views of the mountains to the north and Black Sea to the south. The work done in designing and constructing a structure that both matches and enhances the Sochi skyline, is exemplary. Fundamentally

though it represents a looming structural personification of Putinist domestic policy and the inherent cronyism present in Russian politics.

Above all, being close to the regime pays dividends.

Rotenberg, through his friendship with Putin, has been able to secure construction projects in Sochi that were worth in the region of €5 billion in the build up to the 2016 Winter Olympics. Following the World Cup, his FC Sochi side now have a brand new, state-of-the-art stadium.

In many ways, this sort of infrastructure development is a microcosm of Putin's ongoing aim of dissipating economic centralisation from Moscow and across his vast trans-continental empire. Previously, Putin's reach into provincial football came through his political alliances with club presidents, with Rotenberg being just one example. Kerimov has represented the Republic of Dagestan in the Federal Assembly for over a decade and did so prior to his ownership of Anzhi Makhachkala. Ramzan Kadyrov, head of the Chechen Republic and a key political ally of Putin in the region, has found himself owner of Akhmat Grozny.

Furthermore, since the fall of the Iron Curtain, emerging sides with no connection to the Soviet past have been encouraged by the regime and, though FC Moscow were formed and quickly fell away, this has continued in recent years. In this respect, the former Supreme League heavyweights of Lokomotiv, Spartak, CSKA or Dinamo hark back

to the Soviet era and the now ailing or defunct Kuban Krasnodar and Anzhi Makhachkala were always problematic for the league's image (in the eyes of the RFU) given their separatist associations. Hence, the emergence of FC Sochi, Baltika Kaliningrad, Ural Yekaterinburg and FC Nizhny Novgorod are encouraged as they symbolise an evolving, albeit somewhat manufactured, footballing scene in Russia.

Hosting the World Cup has provided the perfect cover for public money to be spent on improving infrastructure without scrutiny. The aim was to not only provide a stimulus of growth for cities across Russia, and for their respective teams, but to also extend approval for the Putin's regime as far beyond Moscow as possible.

It's a bizarre transition for the dynamic of Russian football from the Moscow-centric attitude of the Soviet era. The aim is to encourage a distinct split from the past but a continuation of the state's interests being represented and furthered by the national game.

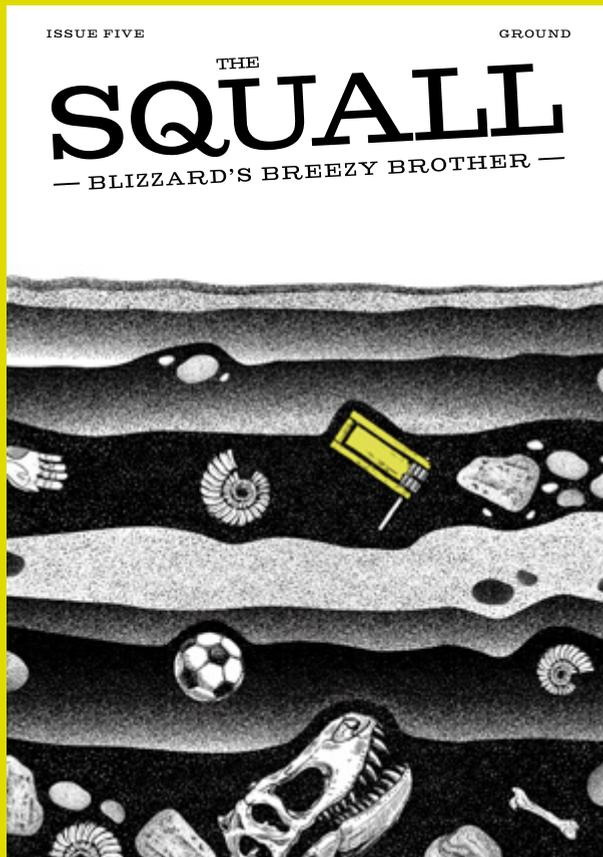
The state hopes that the stadiums will represent a modernising and burgeoning economic power to the world. It's interesting that none of Grozny, Krasnodar, Makhachkala nor Sevastopol were host cities at the 2018 World Cup despite their footballing tradition and, in the case of Grozny and Krasnodar, the existence of modern stadiums. The state continues to grapple for control in these regions, all of which have presented

difficulties for Russia given their separatist associations. As regards Sevastopol, Russia courted enough bad press from Europe for building a bridge to the Crimea: imagine the backlash of hosting a game there.

Ultimately, governmental involvement in football is nothing new, particularly where dictatorships are concerned, but Putin's approach is markedly different. While Recep Erdoğan's affiliation with Istanbul Başakşehir is well documented and FC Astana have backing from the Nazarbayev regime in Kazakhstan, Putin has spread his backing, via associates, across a huge geographical area and a number of cities.

The scale of this project is phenomenal. Dictators have used football clubs to promote an image or adherence to a regime for decades. They've hosted World Cups and international tournaments to justify economic projects and political rhetoric for just as long. The difference here is the scale.

The legacy of Putin's World Cup is one with long lasting, ideological and national identity-focused consequences. You can forget the architectural details, the games they hosted and the clubs that now call them home, these stadiums represent one thing: Putin's Russia. By merely existing they justify an increasingly megalomaniacal and democratically deficient Russian state. They're stationary, concrete State-sentinels, perforating skylines across the Caucasus and Volga. 🇷🇺



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Thank you in advance for helping out.

THE BOYCOTT

How Blackpool fans forced
out the Oyston ownership

BY EWAN FLYNN

*A portrait of former Blackpool
owner Owen Oyston*



Saturday, 9 March 2019.

Two hours before kick-off 10,000 tangerine-clad fans congregate joyously below Blackpool's iconic Tower. It is the first time in four years that this number of Seasiders have gathered together on a match day. Their self-imposed exile from Bloomfield Road will finally end at 3pm when their team kick off against Southend. It is an all too rare example in English football of fan power triumphing. The Blackpool fans, with a helping hand from the High Court, have finally ousted the reviled Oyston family, who owned and fleeced the club over three decades.

The Oystons

The Oyston saga began in 1987 when Owen Oyston – now in his mid-80s and known for his sartorial flair (cowboy hat, sunglasses and long peroxide hair) – bought Blackpool for £1.

Despite an illustrious history, including the most celebrated FA Cup final victory of them all in 1953, Blackpool had fallen on hard times. Throughout the 1980s the club teetered on the brink of bankruptcy.

Oyston stepped in, casting himself in the role of saviour of his boyhood favourites. Using a fortune accrued from his property and media empires, he wiped out the club's debts and promised better times. But questions soon arose about whether he was a suitable leader for the town's beloved institution.

In 1996 Owen Oyston's seedy reputation caught up with him when, close to

retirement age, he was convicted of sexually assaulting and raping a 16-year-old girl. He was sentenced to six years for offences the judge described as "horrendous".

While Oyston was in prison, responsibility for Blackpool passed first to his wife, then later his son Karl, who became Chair. Blackpool continued to bounce around the third and fourth tiers of English football.

Rise and fall

Things changed in 2006, however, with the investment of the Latvian financier Valeri Belokon. Blackpool quickly won promotion to the Championship. Then, remarkably, in 2010 the Seasiders booked their place at English football's top table for the first time since 1971. The estimated £90million Premier League windfall should have guaranteed a lasting legacy. Instead, the Oystons diverted the money into their own bulging pockets. A payment of £11million from Blackpool to another Oyston-owned company prompted one astute fan to comment, "At least Dick Turpin wore a mask."

Relegated after just one season, the club returned to the Championship.

In an interview with the *Guardian's* David Conn, Karl Oyston defended the payment to his father claiming, for opaque tax reasons, they somehow safeguarded the club.

Fans' wellbeing was of less concern. Wonga sponsored Blackpool between 2010 and

2015. The ethics of promoting loans with sky-high interest to supporters in a town battered by the dual tides of government cutbacks and declining seaside tourism never troubled the Oystons.

Austerity was in full swing at Blackpool's Squires Gate training ground. The manager Ian Holloway succinctly described it as a "hellhole" that "every player this club has ever had hates." The misspelling of 'Centre of Excellence' [*sic*] at its entrance was symptomatic of much deeper neglect.

Sensing Blackpool's downwardly mobile trajectory, Holloway departed in 2012. Subsequently, the Bloomfield Road managerial hot seat became more like an electric chair.

Supporter unrest intensified as Blackpool narrowly avoided a further demotion in 2013-14. The Oystons did not seek to build bridges. First Karl was photographed, smiling provocatively, next to a sign that read. "BLACKPOOL FC OYSTON CASH COW ENOUGH IS ENOUGH PUT FOOTBALL FIRST." Then, responding to a fan protest that had showered the pitch with tennis balls, Karl apparently choreographed a picture of his young son clutching a tennis racket in the directors' box

Ahead of the 2014-15 campaign, newspapers reported Blackpool had only eight contracted players. For the season's opener against Nottingham Forest the Seasiders were unable to name a full complement of substitutes.

A club at war

As the team tanked, fans raged. Karl Oyston's mobile number appeared online, prompting some Seasiders to send him abusive messages. Karl Oyston responded in kind. He also antagonistically fitted his Land Rover with an OY51 OUT number plate. Not satisfied with publicly taunting the club's fans, the Oystons brought libel cases against several supporters.

Publication of the club's accounts in 2015, showing loans totalling £27.7 million from Blackpool to its Oyston-owned parent company, confirmed what fans already knew – their club was being asset-stripped.

Marooned at the bottom of the table, Blackpool were relegated from the Championship with six games to play.

It was at the final match of that grim campaign, shortly after half-time, that hundreds of Seasiders invaded the Bloomfield Road pitch. After an hour of "Oyston Out" chants, and a conga line, the game was abandoned. One fan, Bobby Mack, provided an enduring image of individual protest. Amid choruses of "Let him on!" stewards eventually cleared a path. Mack slowly piloted his mobility scooter, left fist defiantly raised, from the north-west corner of the ground to his comrades in the centre circle.

This levity proved fleeting. Five supporters were arrested for their part in the pitch invasion.

Boycott

Extending the Oystons an “ethical exit strategy”, the Blackpool Supporters Trust offered to buy the club. The proposed deal would see the Oystons trouser around £16million for their initial £1 investment. Karl dismissed the bid as “laughable”.

The Blackpool fans were not amused. The Trust under the slogan “Not A Penny More” began a boycott of Bloomfield Road. While a minority of fans found this unbearable, thousands answered the call.

Civil war soon engulfed the Blackpool boardroom. The estranged club President, Valeri Belokon, filed proceedings at the High Court. He claimed the Oystons owed him millions in unpaid investment and missed profit returns.

As the team picked up where it had left off – racing to the bottom of League One and ultimately another relegation – some Seasiders argued the boycott was damaging the club. Despite the occasional exchange of harsh words, those picketing Bloomfield Road stood firm.

Blackpool started 2016-17 in English football’s fourth tier, a division below where they had been when Owen Oyston ‘saved’ the club in 1987.

Remarkably, Owen accepted an invitation to meet hundreds of Supporters’ Trust members in a downtown hotel. In an atmosphere more Galatasaray away than tea at the Ritz, Oyston demonstrated the solidity of his brass neck, regurgitating his narrative – that he always acted in the club’s best interest and had, 30 years ago, saved

Blackpool from extinction – again and again, and again. Psychologists talk of moral licensing, “that past good deeds can liberate individuals to engage in unethical behaviours that they would otherwise avoid for fear of feeling or appearing immoral.” Listening to Owen Oyston that night, it was apparent not only had he granted himself this licence, he’d also photocopied it for Karl.

The boycott continued to gain momentum. Average attendance shrank to 3,461. Nevertheless, ahead of a 4th round FA Cup tie, Karl Oyston dismissed the protest “a hopeless cause” with “dwindling numbers”, engineered by a “handful of people who have no alternatives whatsoever” and “nothing to offer”.

Even as the team produced football’s equivalent of a dead cat bounce, reaching the League Two play-off final at Wembley, supporters stayed away. Previous play-off finals had seen 40,000 Seasiders descend on Wembley. This time, fewer than 6,000 saw their team defeat Exeter.

As the boycott entered its third punishing season, Blackpool’s fans asked why football’s authorities had not intervened. The Chair of the Blackpool Supporters Trust, Christine Seddon, explained that upon top-flight promotion in 2010, the Premier League declined to enforce one of its own statutes. Owen Oyston’s rape conviction meant he failed the League’s Owners and Directors Test. He should, therefore, have divested himself of his majority shareholding. By the time Premier League Chief Executive Richard Scudamore realised Oyston was non-compliant, Blackpool had been relegated back to the Football League’s jurisdiction.

The EFL, in turn, refused to apply its rules retrospectively, noting that Oyston had owned Blackpool for nearly two decades when their regulations on the suitability of owners were drafted.

High Court drama

A more significant result than the play-off final victory came in November 2017. The High Court Judge Marcus Smith found that the Oystons had “unfairly prejudiced” Valeri Belokon, having overseen an “illegitimate stripping” of Blackpool involving “fundamental breaches of their duties as directors.” The Oystons were ordered to pay £31.27million to Belokon.

Having missed the court’s deadline for a £10million instalment, a rift between father and son ensued. In February 2018, Owen suddenly announced that Karl had stepped down as Chair. Banishment extended beyond football. Karl was also removed from “any other Oyston Group company”. Owen vowed to cling on to the club. Keeping it in the family, Natalie Christopher – his 32-year-old daughter – was installed as Chair.

Perhaps not yet fully apprised as to the extent of the Blackpool disaster, or the conviction of the club’s supporters, Christopher told the *Blackpool Gazette*: “It’s an honour to be in this position. The club is 133 years old, or something like that.” She went on to say she hoped to convince a few fans to return, before laying out ambitious plans for the training ground. “I think we can get some showers and a few basic things in there.”

Having survived a season in League One, the draw for the 2018-19 FA Cup 3rd round brought Arsenal to Bloomfield Road. This glamour tie allowed Blackpool supporters to remind the wider world of their plight. One fan scaled the Gunners’ team bus, where he remained unmoved for 40 minutes, forcing Arsenal to make alternative travel arrangements.

Ousted

Finally, on 13 February 2019, the High Court placed Blackpool Football Club into receivership. The club was to be sold to pay off the money owed to Belokon.

Effectively Owen Oyston, after 32 years, had lost control.

The boycott was over. The manufacture of “OYSTON OUT” scarves ceased, the production of “BLACKPOOL ARE BACK” ones began.

In the week preceding the ‘homecoming’ game, the Trust called on volunteers to report to Bloomfield Road for ‘the big clean-up’. It was on the first morning, as 50 or so supporters entered the famous ground, armed with buckets, rubber gloves and industrial-strength cleaning products, that the true legacy of the Oyston era was exposed. A stadium left squalid, coated with four years’ worth of bird shit. Several fans were visibly moved as lovingly, row by row, they scraped and scrubbed every seat in the stadium. One volunteer, David, who first attended a match in 1959, vacillated between joy at the prospect of at last bringing his grandchildren to their first game and

despair at the years of neglect inflicted on his hometown club.

Later that afternoon, a ladder is propped up high in the West Stand. A man climbs to the top and begins dismantling a giant Oyston Estates sign. For those in the stadium cleaning, this is their moment – akin to toppling the statue of a hated dictator.

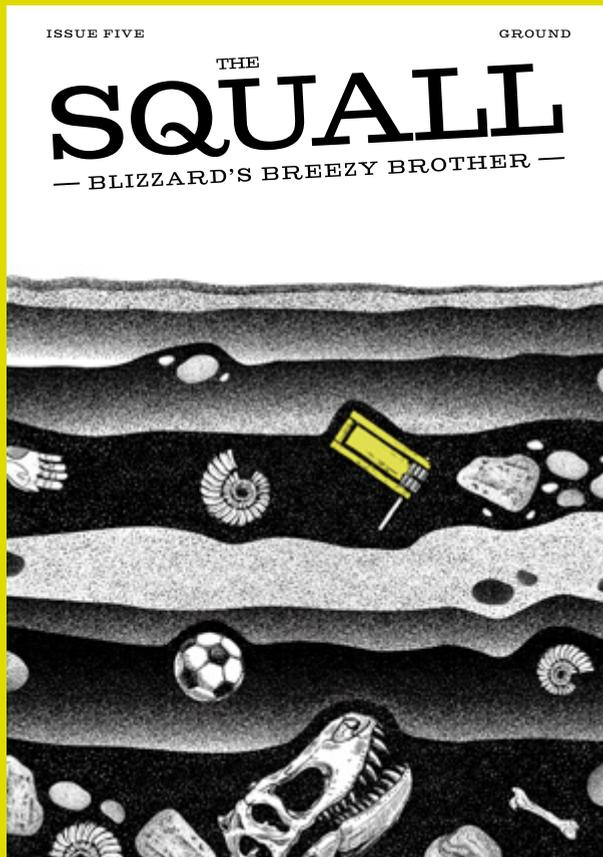
Match day finally arrives. Just before 1.30pm, the crowd sets off in a parade to the stadium. The sun even shines. Blackpool songs are sung. No one has forgotten the words, although some are learning them for the first time. In the queue for a programme one fan tells another, "Being honest, I haven't got a clue who half our players are." Only three of the first-team squad were at the club before the boycott.

Inside, the programme lists the names of the 189 Seasiders who died during the exodus. Legendary right-back Jimmy Armfield is among them. So too is Christine's mother, Joan. Before kick-off, a minute's silence remembers them.

There are no recriminations between those who kept going and those who stayed away.

The day is about being together again at last. The day is about going off your nut celebrating Blackpool's injury-time equaliser. The day is about singing over and over:

"Woke up this morning feeling fine,
Got Blackpool FC on my mind.
We got the Oystons out like we said we would, oh yeah.
Something tells me
I'm into something good." 🗣️



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Thank you in advance for helping out.

GOING TO GROUND

Six of the greatest sliding
tackles of all time

BY GREGORY WAKEMAN

Ledley King against Chelsea in 2006



Bobby Moore

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72z5H9hkYGM>

Brazil 1 England 0, World Cup group stage, Estadio Jalisco, Guadalajara, 7 June 1970

When Xabi Alonso was reflecting on his five years in the Premier League back in 2011, he admitted one prevalent part of the English game had always left him a little bemused.

“Tackling is not really a quality,” the World Cup, European Championship, Champions League, La Liga and Bundesliga winner told the Daily Mail. “You would come across an interview with a lad from the youth team and they’ve asked him his age, his heroes as a kid and his strong points. And he would say things like shooting and tackling. I can’t get into my head that footballing development would teach tackling as a quality.”

Anyone who has ever been to a match in England will know just how visceral and galvanising a ferocious tackle can be to those in the stands and those on the pitch. Fans can’t dream of replicating the skills and talents of the supreme athletes they’re watching, but they can imagine knocking them off the ball with their bulk. While for players, a hard tackle is the easiest way to prove that it means just as much to them as it does to the paying punters.

Despite Alonso’s objections, a tackle can still be beautiful, though. The best example of this just so happens to be the most obvious. Bobby Moore’s pickpocketing of Jairzinho is so iconic that every English fan alive since 7 June 1970 has the image imprinted in their minds.

With good reason, too. Arguably, it’s the most sumptuous and elegant piece of football, let alone defending, that anyone can ever hope to see.

Like a predator going after their prey, Moore is calm, composed and completely in control, even as the rampaging Jairzinho enters the England penalty area. Moore waits and waits to pounce, and when he does his tackle is so smooth and precise that it could have been used as evidence he did actually take the Bogota bracelet. Then Moore glides back to his feet in one fell swoop, while Jairzinho seemingly continues to bounce and spin like an errant sock in a dryer.

A hero is only as good as his villain, though, and the fact that Jairzinho was the most dynamic player in the most complete World Cup team of all time makes Moore’s dispossession of him all the more impressive.

Alessandro Nesta

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMdq9WPz4YY&t=555s>

France 2 Italy 1, Euro 2000 final, De Kuip, Rotterdam, 2 July 2000

In another reality, Alessandro Nesta’s tackle on Sylvain Wiltord would be remembered as the defining moment of Italy’s catenaccio-inspired victory over France in the Euro 2000 final.

There’s a contagious confidence to the way that Nesta razes Wiltord for possession. Not only does he stop him dead in his tracks, but Nesta emerges

with the ball firmly under his control and leaves the Bordeaux forward seemingly timid, deflated and all out of ideas.

If Italy had won, it's easy to imagine Nesta's feat of strength becoming so symbolic that he would have risen from his fifth-place finish in that year's Ballon d'Or to first. Especially since, in the season leading up to the Euros, he'd been at the cornerstone of Lazio's first Serie A victory since 1974, too.

Unfortunately for Nesta, history is written by the victors. So Wiltord's revenge, otherwise known as France's 93rd-minute equaliser, and David Trezeguet's Golden Goal winner just 10 minutes later, means that, alongside Franco Baresi's heroics against Brazil in the World Final of 1994 and Oliver Kahn's brilliance throughout the 2002 World Cup up until the final, Nesta's fine tackle is now just another footballing footnote.

Fabien Barthez

Manchester United 1 Tottenham Hotspur 0, Premier League, Old Trafford, 21 September 2002

Twenty years ago Premier League goalkeepers were there to stop shots and shout at their defenders. Nothing less, certainly nothing more. That was it.

Even though it had been a decade since the back-pass was outlawed, fans were still wary whenever a keeper had the ball at their feet and were instantly outraged if they even considered coming out of their boxes.

So in many ways Fabien Barthez was ahead of his time. Nowadays, Barthez is

primarily remembered for being United's most diminutive and follically challenged attempt to replace Peter Schmeichel. Someone who failed to outwit Paolo Di Canio in a fourth round FA Cup stand-off at Old Trafford and was twice embarrassed by Thierry Henry in a crucial Premier League head-to-head at Highbury.

But a modern context looks much more kindly on Barthez's ability with his feet and bravery to race out of his goal, during which time he turned into a de-facto central defender. Just look at how Ederson, Alisson and Manuel Neuer are lauded for playing outside their boxes.

When United hosted Spurs in September 2002, a Ferdinand slip suddenly let Robbie Keane clean through with just Barthez to beat. Since he was still 40 yards from goal, the Irishman can be forgiven for concentrating on his control rather than checking Barthez's position. If he had looked up, he would have seen that the World Cup and European Championship winner was already on the charge. Barthez usually positioned himself on the edge of his box when United's defence was high up the pitch. But, unlike his peers at the time, he was always ready and willing to confront an oncoming attacker, rather than retreating to his goal. So before Keane had even had a chance to get his bearings Barthez was in his face and soon in possession.

Rather than being celebrated for his impromptu defensive duties, though, the Old Trafford faithful groaned in disbelief at his audacity. Their minds had been thrown back to a year earlier, when Barthez had taken a similar approach in a Champions League group game against

Deportivo, only to slip, slide and allow Diego Tristan to score the winning goal.

Ledley King

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjxmyjLp9tg>

Tottenham 2 Chelsea 1, Premier League, White Hart Lane, 5 November 2006

It's easy to assume people are being hyperbolic when they talk about the heights Ledley King could have reached for Tottenham Hotspur and England if it wasn't for his dastardly knees, particularly when his positioning and innate ability to sniff out an attacking threat meant King was being compared to Bobby Moore when he was just 16 years old.

Even if he had stayed fit and played to 40, King was never going to threaten the England and West Ham legend's legacy. But the numerous examples of King's limitless ability have bolstered his myth and even though he never finished above fourth for Spurs and received just 21 England caps, his place amongst the Premier League defensive greats is still debated to this day.

Those who feel he isn't worthy only need to see his knee-defying tackle on Arjen Robben back in November 2006 to reconsider. This was at a time when José Mourinho's Chelsea were the pinnacle of English football and Robben was the most formidable element of the back-to-back Premier League champions.

So when the 22-year-old speedster was put through at White Hart Lane, after

being played onside by the loitering Pascal Chimbona, it seemed a formality that he would break the deadlock. But, in less than 10 seconds, King showed the mentality, drive and physical adroitness that made him so beloved. As the other defenders stood back and waited for the inevitable, King made up 10 yards on Robben and, just as he was seemingly about to poke the ball beyond a dawdling Paul Robinson, he curved his leg around the Dutchman to poke the ball out for a corner.

Philipp Lahm

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHfy0G1VOTI> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSJo3ojpX94>

Bayern Munich 2 Schalke 04 0, Bundesliga, Allianz Arena, Munich, 7 August 2010

The importance of instantly transitioning from defence into attack in the current football climate means that Jürgen Klopp's Liverpool and Pep Guardiola's Manchester City are most effective in the seconds after they win back possession. So it's not hard to imagine that both of these managers and their coaches have told their players to tackle in such a manner that it speeds up this process.

Luckily for them, they can just point at Philipp Lahm's incredibly effective manner of sliding, winning the ball with his heel and then immediately starting an attack for Bayern Munich. Despite being coached by him for three years, Lahm didn't actually learn this technique under Guardiola. He had been doing it for years

before the Spaniard's arrival, deploying it twice on Ivan Rakitić during Bayern's 2-0 victory over Schalke 04 in the 2010 DFL Supercup. Guardiola clearly encouraged Lahm's to repeat this trick. Under his leadership, in October, 2013, Lahm managed to tackle Manchester City's Jesus Navas (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQ-ZSmGNPCA>) in the exact same fashion.

The benefits to this slide tackle are so obvious that surely either Klopp or Guardiola have an expert on their roster teaching their players how to perfect it, especially after Liverpool's acquisition of throw-in coach Thomas Grønnemark and his immediate improvements to such a tiny part of the game recently inspired their Champions League and Premier League triumphs.

Domenico Zampaglione

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=NUJMrzowCQM

**Tuttocuoio 1957 0 Vigor Lamezia 1, 2a
Divisione Girone B, Stadio Libero Masini,
Santa Croce sull'Arno, 9 February 2014**

Watching a slide tackle turn into a shot and then a goal, all within the space of a few seconds, is such a rare and explosive anomaly that even Xabi Alonso can probably appreciate its beauty.

Arguably the most famous incarnation of this footballing unicorn came at Portman Road in the first month of the Premier League, when Jason Cundy's attempt to reduce Jason Dozzell to rubble flashed by Craig Forrest (https://twitter.com/sid_

[lambert/status/1061958796350767104](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lambert/status/1061958796350767104)) at such speed that he fell into his net like a collapsing drunk.

But this merging of tackle and shot isn't just an English phenomenon. In fact, over in Germany, Sebastian Langkamp's shellacking in Karlsruhe's 1-0 victory at Bayern Leverkusen back in May 2009 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upC-GTwoYTQ>) is superior to Cundy's effort in almost every way. Not only is his initial challenge so picture-perfect it deserves to be hung in a museum, but the trajectory of the ball and the way it loops into the net over the perplexed and stranded Rene Adler is just as pleasing on the eye, too. If it had managed to kiss the bar on its way in Langkamp would now be known as the 2000s Yeboah.

Both pale in comparison to Domenico Zampaglione's ungodly clobbering to defeat Tuttocuoio 1957, though (https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=35&v=NUJMrzowCQM). The midfielder got such ferocity on his tackle that the velocity of his shot somehow leaves the keeper motionless, even though it left the Italian's foot some 75 yards up the pitch.

Of course, all three of these examples would have been eclipsed by Kevin Ball's virtuoso attempt at an own-goal in the Tyne-Wear derby of August 1999. It's probably for the best that his tackle on Duncan Ferguson didn't actually beat Thomas Sorensen (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgRTMm-RgCw>), though. If it had, a 17-year-old Xabi Alonso would almost certainly have retired on the spot. 📺

RIZOUPOLI

How a temporary
ground on the outskirts
of Athens became a
byword for thuggery

BY THEMIS KARAPANAGIOTIS

*An Olympiacos player kneels on
a Panathinaikos player during
their 3-0 win in 2003*



The Georgios Kamaras Stadium is the home ground of Apollon Smyrnis, located in a refugee community (from the Greco-Turkish War of 1919-22) called Rizoupoli, which eventually became the name by which the stadium is commonly known. On 11 May 2003, this 16,000 capacity arena in Athens played host to the most notorious match the Greek Super League has ever witnessed, as Olympiacos and Panathinaikos, the country's two biggest rivals, took the field with the 2002-03 championship on the line. What followed would shape Greek football for the years to come, contributing to its decline and becoming the reference point for every future case of hooliganism in the country.

A year before the 2004 Olympic Games and because of the re-construction of their own stadium in Piraeus, Olympiacos had been using Rizoupoli as the club's home for a few seasons. Their new home would be up and running as soon as the Olympics began. Despite playing their home games in an old and small ground, Olympiacos had already won a joint record six consecutive league titles and were aiming for a record seventh. With two rounds remaining, they were three points behind their eternal rivals. They had lost the first derby that season 3-2 and with head-to-head record used to separate teams finishing level on points needed to overturn that deficit.

Panathinaikos, coached by the Uruguayan Sergio Markarián, had a squad based around a brilliant generation such as Giorgos Karagounis, Giourkas Seitaridis, Antonis Nikopolidis and Angelos Basinas, all of them key members of the Greece side that would go on to Euro 2004.

In the week before the match the tension between the two sides reached unprecedented levels. It wasn't just about the championship. It was much more than that. Srečko Katanec had already been fired by Olympiakos for "not understanding the obsession everyone had with winning the seventh consecutive championship". Panathinaikos, meanwhile, had gone out of the Uefa Cup in the quarter-final to Porto at least in part because of the board's decision to focus on the league.

Olympiacos's owner Sokratis Kokkalis gave a press conference before the match calling for the fans not to cross any line with their behaviour but he used the word "clients" to refer to Panathinaikos, which was considered deliberately demeaning.

Rizoupoli is located in a crowded urban area surrounded by houses and industrial areas. The city train runs nearby, making the approach by road far from straightforward. Panathinaikos's problems began long before they got to the stadium. An operational error by police forced the driver to make his way through the crowd and park just outside the dressing room, directly below the main stand. The players and coaching staff were greeted by ultras with flares, rocks, coins and bottles as they ran from the bus to the stadium entrance. "That day we should not have got off the bus," said Seitaridis. "We should have turned around and left."

16,000 fans, 2,500 of them Panathinaikos supporters, created a heated atmosphere. For a while the chaos around the tunnel was such that Markarián's players could not take to the field to warm up. Only when riot police with shields offered protection could they get to the pitch,

but they were still pelted with missiles and flares. "I remember entering the pitch and I was trying to put out Seitaridis's shirt which had caught fire," said the captain Angelos Basinas. "That game had nothing to do with football. It was a war." When security guards began abusing them, he said, a lot of the foreign players wanted to leave.

No board member went to try to help them. Even club chairman at the time, Angelos Filippidis, stayed at home. The players and the staff were left unprotected by their own administration.

Giorgos Mporovilos, the referee, could have postponed the game but after consulting the football federation they decided it could go ahead.

Olympiacos started strongly and took a third-minute lead as Giovanni headed past Nikopolidis. Stelios Giannakopoulos doubled their lead in the 15th minute. 2-0 was enough to give them the advantage in the table. "The players were scared," said the Panathinaikos forward Krzysztof Warzycha. "I saw [Joonas] Kolkka, [Jan] Michaelsen and [René] Henriksen not knowing where to run or what to do."

"Kolkka and Michaelsen were in shock," said the forward Emmanuel Olisadebe. "They couldn't even speak. This game should never have begun, it was my worst experience in Greece."

Giannakopoulos made it 3-0 just after half-time. Olympiacos went top of the table and wrapped up the title with a 5-1 win over Xanthi.

Panathinaikos's fans, devastated by the result and the atmosphere,

smashed the seats in the stands and started fires and the next day stormed the club's training ground accusing the players of a lack of passion and intensity. They destroyed property and cars, and one of them even slapped Warzycha. Along with the angry fans came Filippidis, the club chairman, who also attacked the players, calling them "chickens". The team was dismantled: a group of players who contributed to many astonishing European nights and played modern and aesthetically pleasing football was used as scape-goats for the title loss. Even though Panathinaikos would go on to win the 2004 championship, they would never again reach the level or the potential of Markarián's team. Rizoupoli was a key moment in the decline of the club.

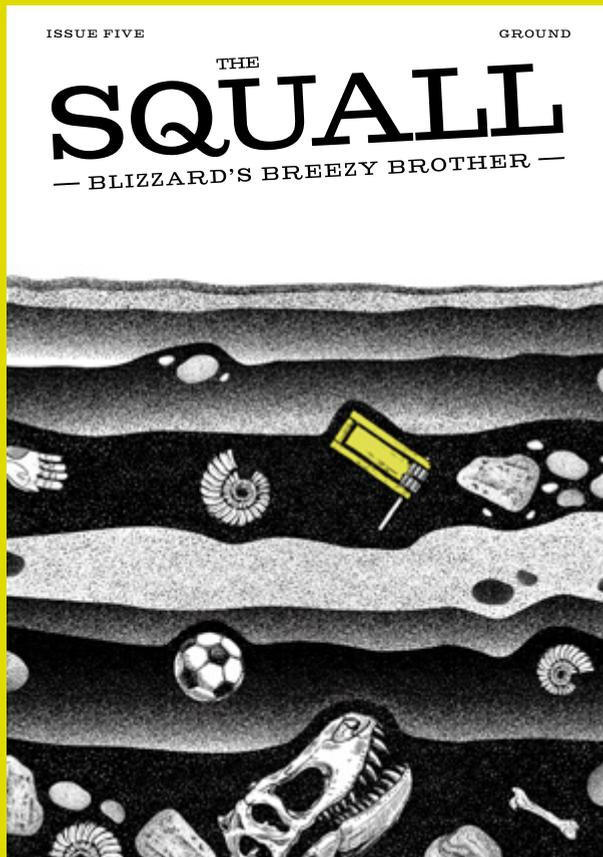
Mporovilos, the referee, insists he was right to start the game, claiming that during the match everything went smoothly. He later became president of the Greek Super League. Giannis Tsironis, the police general and head of the operations, who failed to ensure the safety of the players and fans, was later appointed as Olympiacos's head of security.

Some Olympiacos players played down the events by claiming that they faced the same situation at away matches. "Nobody liked what happened," said Giannakopoulos. "It is what it is. We experience the same hostile atmosphere when we visit Toumba [PAOK's ground]."

"There was nothing different that took place at Rizoupoli that wouldn't have happened at any other stadium," said Alexis Alexandris. "It's a massive derby. You have to expect the rocks and the bottles."

For Panathinaikos fans that day remains a moment of shame, perhaps even an organised attack against the club. For Olympiacos it brought the crowning glory of a seventh title. Greek football,

incompetently run as it habitually is, has suffered many further outbreaks of violence. But it is Rizoupoli that stands always as the reference point. 



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Thank you in advance for helping out.

RETURNED TO THE ELVES

The rugged beauty of
Iceland's abandoned
stadiums

BY JOSEPH FOX & MATT MCGINN



These are the grounds that lie abandoned as Icelandic football migrates to artificial turf and cavernous indoor pitches. Neglected in favour of the new toy, the passage of time has faded these pitches into the landscape. Saplings perform zonal marking in a six-yard box. The base of a mottled post blends with crusty snow. It reminds us of the fragile temporality of the football ground. One moment it is a bustling hub of childhood community. Then all that remains are overgrown memories of sweet volleys and pretending to be Eiður Guðjohnsen. ↵













STRANGERS IN A STRANGE LAND

The role of football in
Jewish displaced person
camps after World War II

BY FINN RANSON

*A portrait of a football pitch within
the prison camp at Landsberg*



Between 1945 and 1950, a quarter of a million Jews lived in West Germany as “Displaced Persons”. An organisation of Jews living as DPs became known as *She'erith ha-Pletah*, the Surviving Remnant, drawn from a quote in the book of *Kings*: “And the surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward.”

Instead of exodus, these survivors endured purgatory at the mouth of hell. Many Polish Jews like Mundek Schulsinger could not return east because of pogroms, and more refugees fled the Soviet curtain in 1947. For some, returning to the scenes of atrocity was unbearable. As the political situation in Palestine stagnated and the United States kept its doors firmly shut, there was little choice but to remain in the DP camps – behind the barbed wire that had imprisoned them, on the German soil which was, as the Yiddish-language Bamberg weekly paper *Undzer Wort* put it, “soaked with our blood”.

But the DPs made this ground their own. For the less acculturated Jews in eastern Europe especially, the past decade had destroyed a whole way of life. Now, in the almost exclusively Jewish refugee camps of the US zone in occupied Germany, there were schools teaching Yiddish, theatre groups, libraries, historical committees, a whole autonomous Jewish culture and social network risen from the ashes. And there was football. Lots of football. The pitch became a nexus of refugees’ longings, mourning and anger.

At its peak in 1947, there were more than 100 Jewish DP football clubs in the

US zone, with a two-tier league system split into regional groups and a host of informal competitions occupying around 15,000 active DPs. Landsberg, a former Wehrmacht barracks in the Munich District, set up a team in July 1945 and became one of the best. Four days after the camp established a dedicated sports department on October 24, the first match report in the *Landsberger Lager-Cajtung* announced that Ichud Landsberg had thrashed Maccabi Turkheim 7-0 in front of 2,000 spectators. A week later, attendance was up to 3,000 for their 1-0 defeat of Maccabi Feldafing.

Kits, boots, balls and heavy machinery to landscape pitches arrived and were distributed by the Centre for Physical Education, part of the system of Jewish self-governance. By April 1946, there was enough competition for Landsberg to organise a Passover tournament featuring the 12 finest Jewish teams of the US zone. Amidst the pre-tournament pageantry that would become common before DP matches, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration director for Landsberg AC Glassgold issued a simple message: “My wish for you, dear athletes, is that the next time you compete with each other it may be next year in Eretz Israel!” (It is a customary greeting of the diaspora at Passover to say “next year in Jeruslaem”).

The Zionist foundations of Jewish football in Europe were fortified in the DP camps. There had been notable exceptions: Poland’s most successful Jewish team, Gwiazda Warsaw, who won the Warsaw A Klasa in 1932 and 1934, were socialist and great rivals of Zionist Maccabi Warsaw. Schulsinger, Landsberg’s veteran star

winger, was instrumental in both title-winning campaigns for Gwiazda, while their talismanic midfielder, Goldberg, was formerly a professional with Maccabi. Now, for Landsberg, they played under the name of the Polish Zionist party – Ichud, 'unity' in Hebrew – invariably facing teams named after Jewish heroes from antiquity like Bar Kochba (which had been a student organization in inter-War Europe), and participating in competitions in which fielding non-Jewish players was deemed "an offence against national pride". After the Holocaust, Zionism was often the only programme that seemed to make sense.

"Sport is seen as a preparation for inhabiting Israel, the promised land," explained Kevin Simpson, author of *Soccer under the Swastika* and a psychology professor at John Brown University. "You build identity but you also build up the body." After the physical and mental degradation of the concentration camps, the DP officials increasingly saw sport and football teams in particular as a powerful means of moulding the "new man": courageous, strong, armed with a proud sense of civic duty and, if it came to it, able to take up arms in the fight for Israel. This was an extension of the ideals of Muscular Judaism that had been promulgated since the late 19th century.

And it was always men. "The masculinity of the young players was emphasised," Simpson added. "They were heralded for surviving the Nazi onslaught. Football was a way for community to rally around youth and virility. It was a way also to repudiate the notion of the effeminate, weak Jewish body." Boxing boomed in the camps for the same reason. "These

are people in mourning. Sport and football represent a way to fight back."

With inexperienced referees and vengeful match reports penned by players, perhaps it is unsurprising then that emotion often overtook ideology. The Passover final between Landsberg and Feldafing with 5,000 in attendance was halted "owing to the unsporting behaviour of the Feldafing players toward the referee". According to the *Landsberger*, after a brief resumption the next day, the match was finally cancelled because the referee was "unable to control the game", leaving the tournament unfinished. Poor discipline and crowd trouble only increased with the introduction of a zone-wide league championships in July. As the journalist Philipp Grammes described, one heated encounter between Regensburg and Straubing came to a head when a Regensburger ran around with a knife in his hand threatening opposition supporters. The game was belatedly abandoned after "physical attacks by the Regensburg side".

The papers were scathing. "Would it not be better to disband the sports clubs, given that they cause us more damage than they benefit us?" one asked. "It is simply a huge disgrace to make enemies of each other just because one side did not win a game." Such scepticism speaks to the moral grey area football still occupied for Jews. During the war, a good right foot could in some instances save you from starvation. But it also enmeshed some prisoners in a twisted reward scheme and an abusive spectacle where they competed against their impoverished comrades for the entertainment of the SS. Primo Levi later

thought of football as a metaphor of survivors' guilt: *You too, like us and Cain, have killed your brother. Come on, let's play together...*

And yet to celebrate his freedom in Katowice, Levi played football with Poles and Italians until he was sick. Even in the most desperate circumstances, football had given hope: now for the DPs it cultivated a new, desperate unity. "So many of these young survivors are without family, especially if they come from the east," Simpson said. "These teams provide a surrogate family." Grammes points out that in the interminable drift of camp life, training and fixtures also gave some kind of invigorating structure, some semblance of life as it had once been – even if some camps, notably under Heymont, were run on overtly military lines. "There is a renewal of self-confidence. They find that they can renew a talent they had."

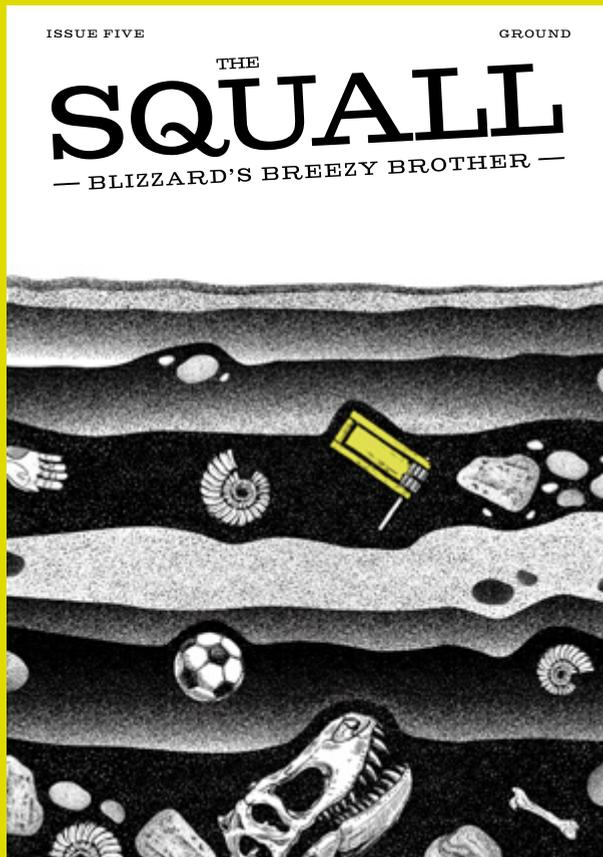
With a team made up exclusively of former professionals, Landsberg eased to successive league titles in 1946 and 1947. By its second year, the top-flight had 22 teams split into a northern and southern division. In 1948, a cup competition was introduced for all 52 league sides with fixtures to be played every fifth weekend. But when the first match day arrived in April, there was little thought for football. The state of Israel finally came into being in May and entire football teams volunteered for the army to defend it against invasion. More or less explicitly, this had always been the end game camp governors intended for their players' short careers. On the eve of war, DP officials were clear: "Today the time has come for Jewish athletes: what we planted in

our bodies on the sports fields must now burgeon with the strength our people need, with stamina, ambition, and the will to fight."

Yet football was so much more than a recruitment drive. It was a source of optimism, sometimes anger – "the best and the worst of us," as Simpson puts it – and affirmed a new collective Jewish identity amongst the survivors, even when they spoke different languages or subscribed to different beliefs. It was a way of forgetting, but these people must have also felt forgotten. Through football – particularly international fixtures against Swiss, Polish and American teams – they could make their mark and reclaim the self-worth which had been stripped away by the Nazis, often on the football pitches of Auschwitz, Mauthausen or Theresienstadt.

Football had extraordinary appeal. Every DP newspaper had a sports section and a biweekly sports magazine was even established in 1947, *Jidisze Sport Cajtung*. Football dominated their pages. Landsberg attracted up to 5,000 supporters throughout both league campaigns. Perhaps it proved so popular there because morale was so poor. "The people of the camp themselves appear to be beaten both spiritually and physically," Irving Heymont, commander of the camp, wrote, "with no hopes or incentives for the future."

Football gave hopes and incentives, however minor. It was part of the future you could find on dozens of DP camp publications: the small image of a felled tree with its stump still firmly rooted in the soil. The trunk lies flat, bare and lifeless. But beneath the stump new shoots flourish and weave into a map of Palestine. 🇮🇸



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WHY IS IT SO HARD TO BUILD A GROUND IN ITALY?

The struggle to update
Italy's increasingly
decrepit stadiums

BY ALASDAIR MACKENZIE

A portrait of the San Siro



There is a certain romance to Italian football. Come for the stylish players, storied clubs and iconic grounds, stay for the evening *aperitivo* under a blood orange sunset.

But in 2020, second-rate facilities, crumbling brickwork and poor views remain as big a part of the matchday experience as a post-match Peroni. Only four Serie A clubs currently have privately-owned stadiums: Juventus, Udinese, Sassuolo and Atalanta. Attempts by other clubs to modernise grounds, or build their own, have been thwarted by a combination of maddening bureaucracy, political resistance and snail-paced decision making. A report this year showed that 93% of stadiums in Italy's top three divisions are publicly owned. Their average age is 63 years, while 42% of seats aren't covered with a roof.

To understand how we got here, we must travel back 30 years to Italia 90.

Italy's first World Cup since 1934 sparked a nationwide stadium-building project. Only two new grounds were built, the Stadio delle Alpi in Turin and Bari's Stadio San Nicola, but many others underwent major renovations.

Milan's San Siro was the most notable example: an extra tier was added, a roof put on and the iconic cylindrical rings added, but Rome's Stadio Olimpico, the Luigi Ferraris in Genoa, the San Paolo in Naples and the Artemio Franchi in Florence were among others to earn big upgrades.

But the construction project went 84% over budget, at an estimated cost of

around €1 billion in today's money. The overspending left a legacy of debt and local councils who owned the stadiums consequently demanded high rents from clubs.

To make matters worse, the Italian Olympic Committee (Coni) provided funds for some projects on the condition that athletics tracks were inserted, leaving match-going fans squinting at the action from a distance and armchair fans with an ugly television spectacle.

But perhaps the most unfortunate element of the Italia 90 construction was the timing. Italy's new grounds weren't the glossy, state-of-the-art spaceships we're now used to, but vast concrete bowls designed predominantly to host massive crowds.

The stadium-building boom was yet to begin and by the time it did in the late 90s, with the creation of impressive grounds like the Amsterdam Arena and Stade de France, Italy had already overspent hugely on its collection of soon-outdated venues. Many stadiums were far too big for their clubs. The San Nicola has a 58,000 capacity, but Bari, now in Serie C, get an average crowd of around 12,000. Lazio and Roma's average attendance is just under 40,000, but that still leaves more than 33,000 empty seats at the gigantic Olimpico. Maintenance costs are high to keep these crumbling grounds up to standard, while clubs struggle to make any meaningful revenue from match days without ownership of their venues.

The Napoli president Aurelio De Laurentiis was particularly outspoken about this in

2018, branding the San Paolo stadium a “toilet” and threatening to move their Champions League games to the San Nicola, as he also owns Bari. “When I discover that PSG pay €1m a year to rent the Parc des Princes, I realise how far behind we are,” he said. “With 47,000 seats, they produce revenue of €100m a year. Napoli can’t get beyond €17-18m because we can’t do anything inside the San Paolo – we can’t do any other activities. The city has done nothing for the San Paolo since 1990.”

He did finally get some help, as the San Paolo had its seats replaced, media facilities upgraded, dressing rooms rebuilt and some other improvements made for the Summer Universiade hosted in the city last year.

A handful of clubs have managed to avoid these issues by taking ownership of their own ground. Udinese rebuilt the Stadio Friuli in 2016, and Serie B side Frosinone spent €20m on the Stadio Benito Stirpe a year later, completing a building project that had begun 30 years earlier. Sassuolo and their ground are owned by chemical manufacturing company Mapei, although the stadium is actually 28km away in nearby Reggio Emilia. Atalanta agreed a deal with the council for the Gewiss Stadium in 2017 and within two years the first phase of major renovation work was completed with the inauguration of the new Curva Nord section.

But Juventus has been the greatest success story by a distance. The Old Lady suffered more than most from Italia 90, with the brand-new but ugly Delle Alpi coming at a cost of around €200m to the Turin city council. It was

hugely unpopular; the 70,000 capacity far exceeded attendances and sight lines were restricted by a Coni-imposed running track.

A deal was struck with the local council in 2002. Juventus bought the Delle Alpi for €25m and tore it down six years later, with the athletics track barely used. Efforts to build a new stadium took longer than expected due to the impact of the Calciopoli match-fixing scandal of 2006, which saw the club relegated to Serie B. From 2006 until the opening of the Juventus Stadium in 2011, they shared the Stadio Olimpico di Torino with their city rivals Torino, a ground that had been newly renovated for the Winter Olympics.

But the opening of the state-of-the-art new venue was a game changer. The commercial opportunities were immediately evident through the creation of stadium tours, premium hospitality packages, a shopping centre, a museum and a medical centre. Within one year of the stadium opening, Juventus home attendances increased from 21,966 to 37,545, while match day revenue went up from €11.6m to €31.8m. By 2018-19, that figure had grown to €70.7m – an increase of 512% since 2011.

Frosinone also enjoyed an immediate new stadium boost, seeing their attendances go up 73.9% and match day revenue increase 150% within the first year of opening. However, Udinese didn’t enjoy as dramatic an upturn, with attendances up 10% and revenue rising of 8.5% in the first year.

Juventus’s success is an anomaly in Italy, and the lack of more club-owned

stadiums has left Serie A behind other Europe's other major leagues: in 2018, Italy's top-flight clubs averaged €13.4m in match day revenue, compared to €36.2m in England, €28.4m in Germany and €27.8m in Spain.

The scarcity of big-name clubs with their own grounds hasn't been for a lack of trying, though. Roma's protracted efforts to build a stadium are perhaps the most indicative of the mind-boggling array of problems clubs can face. The club, who currently share the Coni-owned Stadio Olimpico with Lazio, have been trying to get their plans for the Stadio della Roma off the ground since 2012. The project has been beset by delays, bureaucratic red tape and corruption allegations, and ground is yet to be broken.

Roma's US owner James Pallotta hoped the construction of the flashy new Colosseum-inspired stadium would be his greatest legacy and initially aimed for it to open doors by the start of the 2016-17 season. But after spending eight years and over €70m trying to get the ball rolling, he bowed out altogether by agreeing to sell the club to the Friedkin Group for €591m in July, with little to show for his efforts.

"Maybe we are getting closer again – and how many times have I said that, or heard that? – but maybe, with recent developments, we are close to the final 'final' approval," Pallotta told the club website in June. "I certainly know that, right now, Italy and Rome need this new stadium and need this investment in the country."

Strict regulations around stadium construction or renovation have crippled

hopes of progress for some clubs, with planning permission difficult to come by and the cultural or architectural value of some older grounds preventing changes. The Lazio owner Claudio Lotito purchased land in the north of Rome in 2005 on which he hoped to erect a new stadium, only to be told that he couldn't build there without an existing sporting structure to demolish or reconstruct, a hurdle Roma had jumped by constructing on the site of a racecourse.

The mayor of Rome, Virginia Raggi, encouraged the club to consider renovating the Stadio Flaminio, former home of the national rugby team, which has lain derelict and forgotten since 2011. But Lotito, who is paying €4m per year to rent the Olimpico, said it would be impossible to turn the crumbling stadium into the modern, 24-hour complex he wanted, citing "insurmountable logistical and security reasons". They are at an impasse and no progress has been made for 15 years.

Fiorentina fans are particularly fed up. In June, thousands of them gathered to protest against the bureaucracy that is stopping a new ground being built or the current one reconstructed, due to the Stadio Artemio Franchi's status as a monument of cultural value. Inter and AC Milan managed to dodge this issue. In May, Italy's heritage authority permitted the demolition of San Siro, as little of its original architecture remained following the Italia 90 renovations. However, it's set to remain standing as the clubs have agreed to preserve at least some of the old structure as part of a new sports and entertainment district beside the new ground.

There are now two competing proposals on the table for a brand new 60,000-seater arena in Milan, with plans to have it ready by 2024. The former Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi recently called for new laws to be introduced to aid the development of and investment in new stadiums, believing it will help boost an Italian economy that has been hammered by the Covid-19 crisis. "Football is economy and a stadium creates revenue," he said. "It's essential we remove the urban development limitations. It's unthinkable that San Siro can be renovated, but not the Artemio Franchi in Florence."

Despite the apparent success of the Milan project, the complexity of stadium-building in Italy remains a topic of fierce debate. Giovanni Malagò, president of Coni, is adamant that hosting another major tournament is the obvious answer. "To redo all the stadiums in a country there are only three possibilities: organise a World Cup, European Championship or Summer Olympics," he told *Gazzetta dello Sport*. "At the moment all the clubs are proceeding separately and everywhere it's a state of purgatory between permits, authorisations and traps of every kind."

In another interview in March, he was more specific. "There is only one answer: Euro 2028," he said. "This is the only way, because moving independently, from Verona to Naples, Bari to Cagliari, San Siro to the Marassi, or in Rome, it won't happen."

Italy has tried this route before, finishing second in the bidding process for

Euro 2012 and Euro 2016. Last year, Italian football glimpsed the benefits of hosting when the European Under-21 Championship saw €17m of investment go into stadium improvements in Cesena, Bologna, Trieste, Udine and Reggio Emilia.

The competition in eight years' time currently has two confirmed bids, one from Turkey and the other a joint bid from Romania, Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria. Italy is yet to commit. Another tantalising prospect is the reported €2.2bn investment proposal from the private equity firm CVC Capital Partners for Serie A.

In addition to acquiring 20 per cent of a new company that would manage the league's broadcasting rights, the offer is said to include a new infrastructure fund partly financed by CVC for the construction and maintenance of stadiums.

League bosses now have some thinking to do after receiving offers from six different investment funds this summer. While both options are intriguing, Renzi's idea of relaxing draconian regulations appears the likeliest route to increasing the number of club-owned stadiums across the country and through the divisions.

One-off major tournaments and massive cash injections could help to move things along, but until a system built on exasperating bureaucracy changes, it is hard to see slick new venues popping up around the peninsula.

At least there will always be the romance. 🏆

FREEHOLDING TIGHT

How the Stamford Bridge
pitch has been kept safe
from the developers

BY JESSY PARKER HUMPHREYS

*Dennis Wise is congratulated by
Ken Bates at Stamford Bridge*



The London Athletic Club in south-west London was a familiar spot for city dwellers at the turn of the 20th century. From athletics events to balloon races, the ground fulfilled the booming interest in sport.

The popularity of football was ever-increasing, and so to were the commercial opportunities associated with it. Therefore, as reported by John Tait Robertson, the first secretary manager of Chelsea, "[Gus Mears] and his brother, Mr JT Mears, being as fond of sport as they are wealthy, determined to buy the piece of ground that seemed to them so eminently suited for their purpose." Soon an announcement followed in the *Times* on 11 March 1905: "It has been decided to form a professional football club, called the Chelsea Football Club, for Stamford-bridge".

It is a foundation that has lasted for more than 100 years, and which took Chelsea to the brink of extinction.

The land Stamford Bridge sits on is undoubtedly some of the most valuable in the whole of England. Situated in Fulham, it is unsurprising that for the entire of Chelsea's existence it has been eyed by businessmen and property developers – all intent on turning a football ground into something more profitable.

The freehold to the site has played cat and mouse with the club for the past century, regularly changing hands, leading to protracted legal battles to establish its value and ownership.

The issue began after the death of Gus Mears – the founder of Chelsea – in 1912. As part of his estate, the freehold passed to his sister, Beatrice. Chelsea were ready to purchase it from her until it suddenly turned out it had already been sold. Setting a familiar precedent for rapacious owners wanting to make money out of their own club, their brother JT Mears had bought it. He immediately offered it back to Chelsea for £42,000 – £7,000 more than he had just paid for it.

Unsure of this dubious increase in valuation, the club decided to continue to lease the ground off him – an arrangement that continued until his death in 1935. At that point, the freehold passed into a trust.

Over the following 30 years, Stamford Bridge began to fall into disrepair. The North Stand was forced to close for safety reasons whilst the East Stand's licence was expected to be denied by the Greater London Council. As the ground crumbled, the beneficiaries of Mears's trust wanted to sell the freehold of the club to allow all the beneficiaries to receive remuneration.

It was Chelsea's chairman Brian Mears, grandson of JT and a beneficiary of the trust, who suggested that Chelsea could buy the freehold to the club alongside a redevelopment of the ground. The original cost of this was optimistically pitched at £1million, with about half of that being spent on the freehold. The reality was much higher.

As building work was delayed, the costs of the rebuild continued to rise and Chelsea's debts spiralled out of control. In match-

day programmes, the club requested that supporters donate match balls. By 1976, a year after Chelsea's relegation to the Second Division, the *Times* was reporting that the club's creditors had given them a year to "put their house in order".

To do this, the business split in two. SB Properties took on the ownership of the ground alongside the debts as a holding company, with Chelsea's directors controlling the majority of the shares.

When Ken Bates bought the club in 1982, as Brian Mears was forced out in part due to his failure to oversee the Stamford Bridge rebuild, it was assumed that the existing arrangement would continue. Bates described Chelsea as a "stately home run down" and supposedly arrived at an agreement with David Mears, half-brother of Brian and a member of the Chelsea board, to take ownership of SB Properties. Bates even threw in a Volvo to sweeten the deal.

Yet Mears instead sold SB Properties, and the freehold to Stamford Bridge, to a property developer called Marler Estates. Instead of taking a cash offer, Mears took shares in the company. Like his grandfather fifty years earlier, he wanted to make sure that he profited from any future development of the site.

For almost 80 years, the Mears family had tied the ownership of the club and ground together. Now, for the first time in Chelsea's history, their claim over Stamford Bridge was gone.

Marler Estates wasted no time in identifying the commercial worth of the

Stamford Bridge site. It was immediately clear that retaining a football ground in the area would only minimise the fiscal potential of a residential and commercial complex expected to be worth £32 million.

Their interest in football stadiums did not stop at Stamford Bridge as they bought up Craven Cottage and Loftus Road, as well as putting in an offer for Selhurst Park. All were considered as options to move Chelsea into. A particularly bizarre option involved turning Fulham and Queens Park Rangers into one team and giving Chelsea the other ground: the proposal for Fulham Park Rangers was rejected by the league.

Meanwhile, Bates was desperately trying to retain any remaining influence Chelsea had in SB Properties. Marler had a 70% stake, but until they held 75% of shares they were forced under company law to consult minority shareholders before disposing of their largest asset – in this case, the freehold to Stamford Bridge. Bates took out an injunction to prevent any other shareholders selling out to Marler. This kind of stalling would be of immense importance to Chelsea.

Marler was unable to do much about Stamford Bridge until the seven-year lease that had been agreed with Chelsea ran out, which it was due to in August 1989. The club did hold an option to buy, but unsurprisingly there was a large difference between Marler's valuation of the grounds and Bates's. "In just three years, Marler has said the value of the ground has gone up from £4 million to £12, £18, £25 and now £40," complained Bates in 1987.

Meanwhile, the two sides presented their rival visions for a new Stamford Bridge to the council. In the past, Chelsea had struggled to convince the Conservative-dominated local council of the importance of the club remaining in the area. Bates was fatalistic about what would happen if Marler was successful in gaining planning permission: "The bulldozers will be in by August 1989." Despite a surprise Labour majority initially giving Chelsea the upper-hand, a letter-writing campaign from the Fulham Conservatives Association prompted a government inquiry into Chelsea's redevelopment plans.

Another delay left the clock ticking ever closer to the end of Chelsea's lease.

Yet in the background, a much bigger crisis was starting to take place.

In April 1989, Marler were bought by a different set of property developers called Cabra Estates. As Bates continued to throw every legal method at Cabra in an attempt to retain Chelsea's place at Stamford Bridge, they began to suffer from the fallout of 'Black Friday'. After posting a loss of £11 million, their shares plummeted. With the property market in Britain crashing, Bates invested £3 million himself in Cabra, becoming a minority shareholder to try to influence proceedings from the inside. In the end, it did not matter, as within six months Cabra Estates had gone bust.

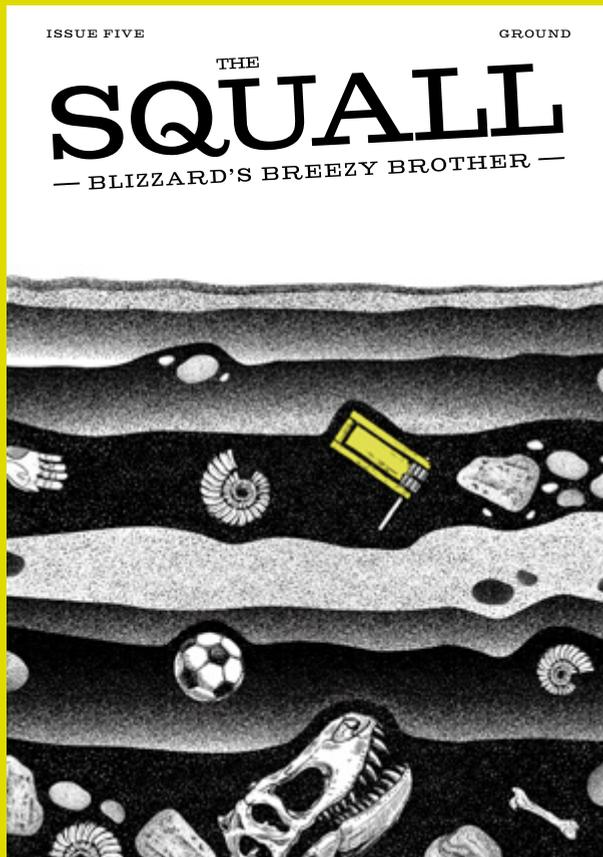
Ken Bates had spent over a decade trying to regain control over the freehold. In that time, Chelsea bounced between the First

and Second Divisions, even coming within two points of relegation to the Third in 1983. Adrift from Stamford Bridge, it was as if the club was unable to hold a consistent identity. How could a club built to fill a stadium thrive when that link was severed?

The Royal Bank of Scotland took over Cabra's assets and leased Stamford Bridge back to Chelsea with an option to buy for £16.5 million. When the freehold was eventually bought, Bates immediately passed it on to the Chelsea Pitch Owners. Intent on ensuring that Chelsea never faced losing the ground again, Bates had created the shareholder scheme to dilute any potential control of both the freehold and naming rights. The CPO only license the use of the name Chelsea Football Club on the condition they play their home games at Stamford Bridge.

It is a set-up that Bruce Buck and Roman Abramovich have tried to undo in more recent times with little success. While sites like Battersea Power Station have been explored, the CPO has done its job and has never voted to return the freehold or move the club.

But Chelsea's experience should be a cautionary tale for other clubs. In recent years, it has become increasingly popular for clubs to sell their grounds to owners. It gives teams greater cash flow and the opportunity to circumvent Financial Fair Play rules. That might seem like a useful trade at the time, but football owners are fickle and it only takes one generous developer to turn their heads. After all, the Mears family founded Chelsea and ran it for eight decades. When they thought the money was elsewhere, they followed it. 



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THE HIGHEST DERBY IN THE WORLD

Bolivar, The Strongest and
how altitude influences
La Paz's great rivalry

BY HARRY ROBINSON

*A shot of the Libertador Simon
Bolivar stadium in La Paz*



The soundtrack to Bolivia's capital, La Paz, which sits 3,600m above sea level, is unique. Vans choke up the city's endless hills and *cholitas* natter and bargain with their latest customer. Once a derogatory term for a castigated and discriminated section of society, *cholita* is now an affectionate name for the Aymara indigenous women. Deliberately undersized bowler hats perch on their heads, a tradition encouraged by British railway workers who ordered hats from Italy and, upon realising they were too brown and too small, convinced these women to buy them. The exact position of the hat now shows whether the woman is married or not. Many of them sit street-side, surrounded by bulging sacks of potatoes and fruit. Others spend their Thursdays and Sundays wrestling atop one of La Paz's vast hillsides.

But the soundtrack to La Paz is one heavily accented by the heavy breathing of the foreign tourist. There is less oxygen in the air and even those who feel no altitude sickness must occasionally pause on the side of the road and pant. While they do so, a *cholita* strides by with a 20kg sack of potatoes over each of her shawled shoulders.

Overhead, a cable-car system carries thousands to El Alto, a sprawling red-bricked hilltop city. And in these two overlapping cities where the air is so thin exists a passionate football culture.

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"The *clásico paceño* is different to all others," insisted a fan of Club Bolívar. Every derby has its own intricacies but in the context of Latin American football,

he has every right to make such a claim about that of La Paz.

It's Bolivian football's biggest game, contested between two clubs with long and successful histories. With 29 national titles, Club Bolívar are the dominant force. Named after Simon Bolívar, they are the only Bolivian club to have reached the semi-finals of the Copa Libertadores.

Their rivals are The Strongest, whose English name is a nod to the pasty travellers who brought the game to the Andes. *El Tigre* have fewer trophies than their rivals but a proud history. They are Bolivia's oldest club. It was they who inaugurated the Estadio Hernando Siles where both teams now play. It is neither side's home stadium but its 42,000-person capacity indulges ticketing demands.

La Vieja Escuela, the *barra brava* of Bolívar, sit in the stadium's Curva Norte. Decked out fully in light blue on match days, they've been the main ultra group since 2012. It's been a relatively smooth transition from three rival *barras* to one and their philosophy is now to support the team rather than scrap with the opposition.

That's an ideal taken up by both sets of *barras*. "Yes, it's more of a party," explained Rodrigo Parra Salinas, a Bolívar fan who has collected more than 300 of his team's shirts. "It is different. La Paz is a city known for being Bolivia's economic and political centre. There are people from all areas of the country. We live in peace. There's a lot of tolerance because everyone knows that the fan base of both clubs isn't necessarily born in La Paz."

But when either team faces Chilean opposition, for example, “then it becomes dangerous,” Rodrigo said.

10,000 Bolivar fans went to la Bombonera in Buenos Aires for the 2004 Copa Sudamericana final. It’s an eight-hour journey by air but the 38-hour coach journey was an equally popular choice for fans. Boca Juniors, though, were too good.

Rodrigo sits in the Curva Norte of the stadium. At the end of the 1980s, Bolivar’s *barras* invaded the Curva Sur, fighting with The Strongest’s fans and trying to establish themselves in their rivals’ section. The state had to get involved, insisting the two *barras* separate. Between them, the leaders decided that whoever’s team won the next *clásico* would earn the right to stay. The Strongest won 3-0 and have remained in the Curva Sur since 1993.

The Strongest have a colourful support. They’ve played in yellow and black since the early 20th century and their *barra*, *La Gloriosa Ultra Sur 34*, predates their Bolivar equivalent by more than two decades.

LGUS34 meet on the corner of Diaz Romero, just below the stadium’s Curva Sur, making their way to the sound of drum beats, trumpets, cymbals and a ‘Tigre’ war chant.

In 1930, The Strongest won the league championship without conceding a single goal and inaugurated the Estadio Hernando Siles. A couple of years later, the players who achieved that great feat took on a very different battle.

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Bolivia has many neighbours, but not many friends. They have been landlocked since defeat to Chile in the 1884 War of the Pacific. The recently deposed President Evo Morales made the issue a priority during his 13-year presidency but the International Court of Justice ruled against Bolivia, a country which still has a navy despite a distinct lack of water on which to sail.

In 1932, Bolivia fought Paraguay in the bloodiest Latin American military conflict of the century, contesting the oil-rich Gran Chaco region. Bolivia won just a single battle, named *La Batalla de Cañada Strongest* – thought to be the only battle in history named after a football team. It was The Strongest who steered their country to victory in a division filled by players, coaches, directors and fans. Renato Sainz, who played in the 1930 World Cup, fought while the club captain Victor Hugo Estrada Cárdenas was taken prisoner by the Paraguayans. Another player, José Rosendo Bullaín, was killed as he and teammates searched for cannons. 600 fans had signed up alongside them.

They recovered to win titles again in 1935 and 1938, but 25 years after the battle all 20 members of their team were killed. Invited to an exhibition game in Santa Cruz in September 1969, their plane disappeared on the return journey. It had crashed near the rural town of Viloco. All 69 passengers and five crew members died in a tragedy attributed to pilot error.

The Strongest managed to fight on through the direction of their great President, Don Rafael Mendoza, who built the Achumani Sports Complex and organised games against Pelé’s Santos

and Boca Juniors. Bolivian football was still finding its feet. Some would say that remains the case today.

The first league started in 1914 but it was only in the mid-1950s that teams outside of La Paz joined. The country's meek showing in 1978 World Cup qualification forced change. Top clubs broke away and formed a new league which survived until 2017 when the Bolivian Football Federation wrestled back control and in doing so organised three league seasons within a year. The Strongest won one and Bolivar two. It was the country's fifth restructuring of the leagues in 50 years, the strangest of which involved some teams being relegated mid-season in 2005.

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Kettle drums, firecrackers and confetti make for an incredible atmosphere at the Hernando Siles. The Siles is tucked in between a scattering of high-rise flats. The night before I'd stood at a viewpoint about a kilometre away. The pitch looked good but the terraces perfect, against an extraordinary background of a million twinkling *paceño* lights and snow-capped mountains, a reminder that although the sun shines during the day you are in fact two and a half times higher than the peak of Ben Nevis.

Cholita stalls were spread out along the pavement. Meat sizzled on a hot plate, to the left of which was a child's stool for the next customer: me. I chatted and ate *sandwich de Chola* – a roll stuffed with pulled pork, pickled veg and salsa – and drank *refresco de mocochinchi*, a refreshing sugary drink made from a dehydrated peeled peach.

I made my way into the Curva Sur and from the steps watched two hundred bouncing members of LGUS34 hop towards the entrance. Many of them bought thin polystyrene sheets on their way in to provide some additional comfort on concrete seats.

I stood above LGUS34 for a half. An old man decked out in a clean white coat and hat wandered along the front of the stand with a tray and what seemed to be a petrol canister. He made his way towards me, creaking knees struggling on the concrete steps, and after using his canister to propel himself upwards he poured a sweet hot chocolate out of its lid. I joined LGUS34 in the lower tier to celebrate four second-half goals and a 5-2 win.

Very occasionally, the *clásico* is played away from the Hernando Siles. For *paceños*, these are the most memorable games. Bolivar were crowned champions in 1997 after a two-legged tie which involved games at both clubs' real home grounds. Repairs to the Hernando Siles in 2011 forced the *clásico* to go to Achumani, the home of The Strongest whose fans insisted that no Bolivar supporters would be welcome.

"We organised ourselves in a caravan with flags, got out about four blocks away and began walking up," Rodrigo remembers. "They were shocked. We went into the stadium and practically filled it. We still sing about it now. These games are special because fewer people are allowed in."

Payback came in 2016 when The Strongest won the league on Christmas Eve with a derby victory at the Siles.

Up the hill and accessible by cable car is El Alto. A sprawling flea market, one of the world's largest, threatens to tumble off the hill's edge. Everything is for sale: designer clothes, barber's chairs, front doors, old chicken-shop fryers, a table-football table with 'Qatar 2022' stamped on its side. Delve further into the El Alto grids – La Paz moving out of sight – and you'll find a new stadium which perhaps offers a fresh dawn for Bolivian football.

This residential mass is a world away from La Paz, the governmental hub, and it has long sought its own identity. The arrival of Club Always Ready, based in La Paz until 2018, may provide some civic pride. Their name derives from the Scouts' motto, 'Be Prepared'. Translated into the Spanish '*Siempre Listo*', it seems to have been re-translated into a more literal 'Always Ready'.

In 2018, they moved into Estadio de Villa Ingenio, a government-funded 25,000-seater ground. It supposedly meets the standards for international tournaments but sits at a breath-taking 4,150m above sea level. That football is played in these conditions is quite incredible. Few can manage it. Argentina

have a long history of defeats in La Paz. Messi threw up in 2013 and four years later la Albiceleste's players took a pre-match cocktail of viagra and caffeine to arrest the effects of the altitude. They still lost 2-0.

Perhaps Bolivia will soon play in El Alto. Their home advantage will grow to even greater levels. Hopefully their football will too. Always Ready, who wear kits similar to those of River Plate, have ambitious owners, a father and son who have outlined their intentions of winning the Copa Libertadores. No Bolivian team has ever bettered Bolívar's semi-final appearances. Always Ready were promoted in 2018 and now compete in the Sudamericana, the continent's second-tier club competition. Perhaps a future in the Libertadores awaits them. Perhaps they will be a part of a great *clásico*.

But the *clásico paceño* will always be Bolívar and Tigre where, in the wrong areas of town, "they can hit and kick you", according to Rodrigo, but the real "trophy of war" is a flag from the opposing *barra brava*, stolen and turned upside down to show victory. It may be tame compared to other *clásicos* in the continent but when a short walk leaves you panting, maybe that's not a surprise. 🤔

TERROIR

How vacant lots overcame
the playing fields

BY JONATHAN WILSON

*A portrait of Ferenc Puskás
before Hungary's 6-3 win
over England at Wembley*



“Show me how you play,” the Uruguayan poet and theorist Eduardo Galeano once wrote, “and I will tell you who you are.” It’s an easy truth, one that chimes with Albert Camus’s point that sport, better than anything else, reveals our morality. Within this restricted space, within these laws, how will we conduct ourselves, what will we try to get away with? But Galeano isn’t just talking about how far we push the boundaries of the rules: he is talking about the approach we take: direct or subtle, artistic or pragmatic, self-indulgent or driven by the demands of the team? And to a large extent, that is governed by conditions. Show me where you play, and I will tell you how you play. What is true of wine, perhaps, is true of football: the terroir matters. You will be conditioned by the environmental and cultural circumstances in which you learned the game, and those cultural circumstances themselves will be at least partly shaped by the environment.

Football as we know it today was created by a meeting between representatives of various schools and London and suburban clubs held at the Freemason’s Arms in Lincoln’s Inn Fields on 8 December 1863. It was the culmination of a series of discussions that had begun six weeks earlier and brought to an end a process that had been going on for around half a century to try to draw up a standardised set of laws so that games could be arranged without the need for protracted haggling over regulations in advance.

The mob game, which at least in certain areas appears to have been born of ancient fertility rites, the placing of the ball in the goal (often a hole in the

ground) symbolising the fertilisation of the earth by the sun, had existed in Britain for centuries. It was often violent and anarchic and was frequently outlawed. But it was fun, and variants of it were adopted by various schools as they sought ways to allow their pupils to burn off excess energy. Sitting around in isolation, it was feared, would lead to introspection and masturbation, two practices that were greatly feared. Clattering about after a ball, meanwhile, seemed a way of physically toughening boys – and perhaps even breeding some semblance of tactical awareness and leadership – for the rigours of running the Empire. Those two theories came together in the doctrine of Muscular Christianity and the sense that physical exertion was a virtue in and of itself.

But different schools played on different surfaces. Cheltenham and Rugby, for instance, had wide open grassy fields. A player could fall on the ground, others could jump on him and he could emerge from the mud relatively unscathed. There the game differed little from the mob game. But at Charterhouse and Westminster, the game was played on cloisters. More discretion was needed if there were not to be regular broken bones. It was there that handling of the ball was outlawed and the dribbling game developed. Prefects or older pupils would run with the ball, their teammates lined up behind them in case the ball bounced loose in a table, and their opponents – or, at certain schools, their fags (that is, younger pupils who were effectively their servants) would try to stop them.

That codification of the game meant grassy fields became the standard, but

the key decision of that final meeting in December 1863 was to outlaw carrying the ball, leading to the resignation of Blackheath from the Football Association and, ultimately, the creation of rugby as a distinct game.

Soon the muddy pitch became regarded, by the English mind at least, as the only legitimate surface, so much so that when England lost 4-3 to Spain in Madrid in 1929, their first defeat to continental opposition, it was widely dismissed as an irrelevance because it had been played in summer on a hard and dusty pitch on which the ball bounced high. And that was also why the 6-3 defeat to Hungary at Wembley in 1953 hit so hard. It was played on a misty November day on a damp pitch of Cumberland turf: there were no excuses.

The challenge to British football in the early twentieth century came simultaneously from two seemingly very different places: the Danube and the River Plate. Both began to prioritise technical accomplishment as opposed to the hard running and physicality of the British game, both enjoyed success in international competition between the Wars and, although England was happy to ignore that, both went on to achieve notable successes against British sides in the fifties. And both shared certain environmental factors.

Buenos Aires and Montevideo, Budapest and Vienna – all underwent rapid industrialisation and urbanisation in the early twentieth century. The cities expanded to accommodate immigrants from rural areas and, amid the construction, space for recreation

was to be found mainly in vacant lots. It was there that children gathered to play, kicking around a rag ball on a surface that was often hard, uneven and crowded. Technique was prioritised and, with no teacher to maintain order, so too, particularly in South America, was the capacity to look after yourself. In Buenos Aires, these spaces became celebrated as '*potreros*', in Budapest as '*grunds*', the well-springs of a distinctive style of play.

Argentina was a young country in search of an identity. It initially found it in the *gauchos*, the solitary horsemen of the pampas, one of whom, Martín Fierro, was the hero of the country's national epic. Gaucho clubs sprang up in Buenos Aires to celebrate the culture, but they were essentially fancy-dress barbecues, not a way to live. In the *pibe*, the urchin kid of the *potreros*, though, could be found an updated urban alternative. That was why in 1928, Borocotó, the editor of *El Gráfico*, proposed raising a statue to the inventor of dribbling, saying it should depict "a *pibe* with a dirty face, a mane of hair rebelling against the comb; with intelligent, roving, trickster and persuasive eyes and a sparkling gaze that seem to hint at a picaresque laugh that does not quite manage to form on his mouth, full of small teeth that might be worn down through eating yesterday's bread. His trousers are a few roughly sewn patches; his vest with Argentinian stripes, with a very low neck and with many holes eaten out by the invisible mice of use. A strip of material tied to his waist and crossing over his chest like a sash serves as braces. His knees covered with the scabs of wounds disinfected by fate; barefoot or with shoes whose holes in the toes suggest they have been made through

too much shooting. His stance must be characteristic; it must seem as if he is dribbling with a rag ball. That is important: the ball cannot be any other. A rag ball and preferably bound by an old sock. If this monument is raised one day, there will be many of us who will take off our hat to it, as we do in church."

In doing so, of course, he was describing, 32 years before his birth, the figure of Diego Maradona, whose footballing education came on the rough alleys of Villa Fiorito.

The *grunds* of Budapest fulfilled a similar function. They developed technique, Ferenc Török wrote in his biography of the full-back Gyula Mándi, "because the cloth ball couldn't bounce and they had to guide it, dribble with it or shoot in a way that it would not or just hardly touch the sandy, uneven ground with grassy patches, otherwise it would have got stuck immediately."

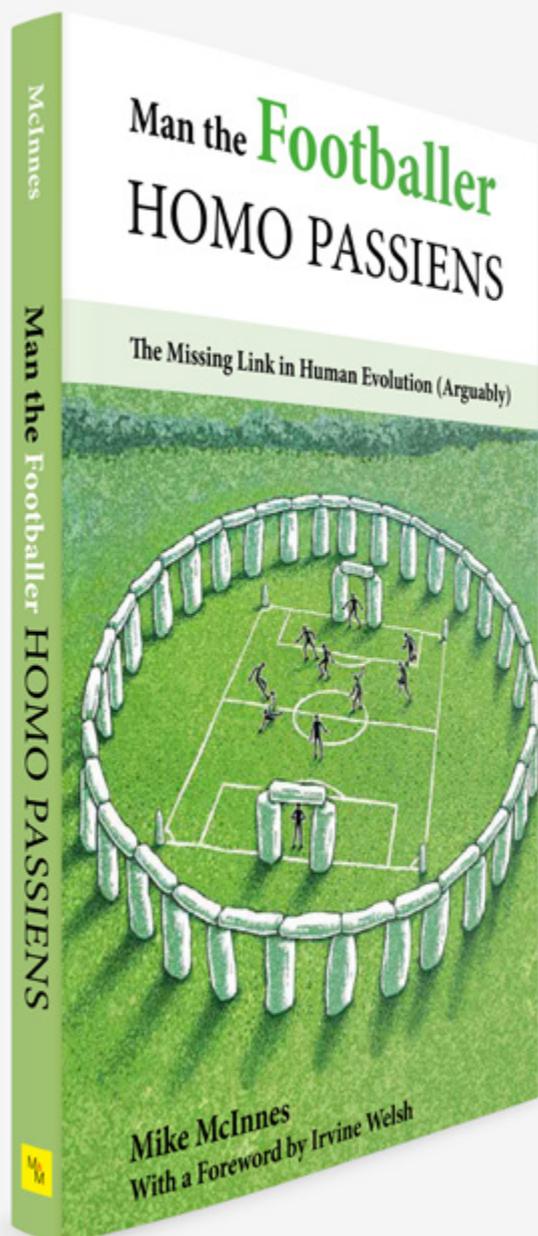
But they also taught character. "Matches played at Tisza Kálmán tér provided my

father and his mates with a fantastic basis for football," said Attila Mándi, Gyula's son. "Since the occasional teams only had a goalkeeper as an emergency player, almost everybody had to defend and attack, too. This also meant that nobody on the square could act like a star."

And so the environment shaped players just as surely in South America and Central Europe as it had in Britain. Conditions are more homogenised now. Players from all over the world find themselves whisked off to academies at a very young age. The street footballers of old are disappearing and with them some of the rough edges, some of the individualism. But Arsène Wenger always argued English football developed as it did because of the wind. There are those who blame the dearth of West African wingers on the narrow street games of Accra or Lagos, bounded by drainage ditches. Concrete still produces different footballers to sand or mud or grass.

The terroir still leaves its mark. 🗣️

SERIOUS NONSENSE



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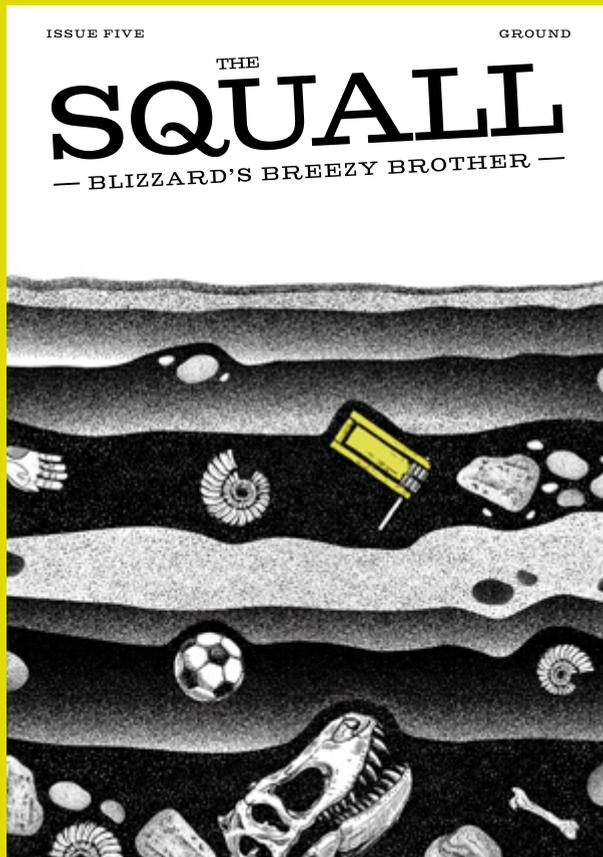
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THE
SQUALL
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Issue 5, September 2020, Ground

Featuring:

Dave Bowler, The Summit

Luke Connelly, Diplomatic Manoeuvres

Ewan Flynn, The Boycott

Gregory Wakeman, Going to Ground

Themis Karapanagiotis, Rizoupoli

Joseph Fox & Matt McGinn, Returned to the Elves

Finn Ranson, Strangers in a Strange Land

Alasdair Mackenzie, Why is it so hard to build a ground in Italy?

Jessy Parker Humphreys, Freeholding Tight

Harry Robinson, The Highest Derby in the World

Jonathan Wilson, Terroir

